

**DEATH
OF A
VESTAL VIRGIN**



A. C. TASSIE

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by

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PROLOGUE

"We've been here half the morning, Gaetulicus! Are there still no birds?"

"None," the magistrate answered, glancing down at the bald head of the blindfolded man who squirmed peevishly in his chair. He returned his gaze to the south, scanning a ninety-degree sector of the sky, bounded on the east by the Forum Romanum and on the west by the wharves and warehouses on the bank of the Tiber. Directly ahead was the Circus Maximus about a half mile distant. The rising sun, barely clear of the Esquiline hill, bathed the arena's immense structure in a milky light which made it seem much closer.

The augur sighed. "Tell me, boy, is this the first time you've taken the auspices?"

"It is, sir, my first," Gaetulicus said. And, he thought, is it my fault there are no birds?

Gaetulicus curbed his irritation at the old man's waspish manner, well aware of its roots. Both men were of noble consular families, but Gaetulicus was a patrician and the augur, Pastor, was a plebian. Gaetulicus, not yet twenty-four, was a newly elected quaestor, a junior magistrate; Pastor, almost seventy, was a senator of long standing and one of the sixteen members of the College of Augurs. And Pastor had nursed a grudge against the patrician class since his boyhood. When Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, later to become Augustus Caesar and Rome's first emperor, had increased the roll of patrician families to strengthen the ruling class which had been badly depleted during the long civil wars, Pastor's family had been omitted despite centuries of loyal service to the republic.

Then he saw them. "Sir, there are birds now. Approaching from the southeast. Doves, I think. Yes, six white doves."

"And about time," the augur grumbled. "Now tell me exactly what they do and as it happens!"

"They're wheeling in a tight circle about a hundred feet way, almost in front of us and about fifty feet above our level. And..."

"Yes, yes! What else?"

"A larger bird, a falcon, has flown in from the west and it's attacking the doves! They're scattering but the falcon has caught one in its talons! The other doves have disappeared, and the falcon is flying toward the forum. I can still see it clearly and it...oh!"

"What, boy? What's happened?"

"Sir, the falcon dropped the dove and it fell..."

"Of course it fell! But where?"

"Caesennius Pastor, the dove fell onto the dome of the shrine of Vesta."

The augur sat silently for a whole minute. The only sound was the muted early morning cacophony rising from the forum a few hundred yards away. Then Pastor removed his blindfold and blinked in the sunlight. Remaining seated, he looked up to the young man standing beside him.

"Junius Lentulus Gaetulicus," he said, no longer bullying, "we are on the *auguraculum* of Rome close by the temple of Jupiter Best and Greatest." He paused and stared into the magistrate's eyes as though to enhance the gravity of his words. "Do you swear by the paramount god and by the gods of your house that what you have described to me is true?"

The magistrate faced the older man and raised his clenched right fist to his breast. "Plautius Caesennius Pastor, I swear by Jupiter and by the *lares* of my father's household."

"By virtue of your public office you were designated by the college of priests to solicit the

gods for a sign of their will before the sacrifice of a heifer on the altar of Hercules tomorrow, the twelfth of August."

"I was, sir."

"The sign has been given you and it is not propitious. It foretells a profanation of the shrine of Vesta, thereby placing in peril the eternal power of Rome and the welfare of its people."

A pious man, Gaetulicus blanched. "Sacrilege! Against the mother goddess of Rome!"

"Yes," Pastor said. "We will go to the *flamen Dialis*. He must be advised at once of the threat to the city."

Gaetulicus nodded in understanding. The *flamen*, highest ranking priest of Rome, must be the first to learn of the threatening menace. "To his house on the Palatine, sir?"

"No, we'll go to the temple and have the custodian dispatch an attendant to summon the *flamen*. What I must tell him should be done in a sacred place."

The magistrate picked up the augur's folding chair and the two men walked in silence toward the temple of Jupiter, Gaetulicus dumbfounded by the awesome result of his first auspices; Pastor pondering whether or not he should reveal his full divination to the high priest of Jupiter. The sign of impending sacrilege was all too plain. But there was something more. He was certain the omen pointed to the violent death of a Vestal Virgin.

Certain? Almost, but not quite, Pastor reflected. And if I were to predict the death of a Vestal and it didn't happen, I'd lose dignity, authority. Also, the Vestals are under the *potestas* of the emperor in his capacity of *pontifex maximus*. Tiberius wouldn't take kindly to public alarm over the Vestals if it came to naught. So then, a simple unqualified divination of sacrilege would be prudent. And should one of the Vestals meet a violent death, the event would fall within my augury. Either way, he thought, there is certain to be profanation. The sign revealed to Gaetulicus was unmistakable.

Unknown to Plautius Caesennius Pastor, the sacred shrine of Vesta had already been profaned. One of the Vestal Virgins had forfeited her right to that title.

CHAPTER I

"The gods have forsaken me! Ruination! And *you...*" Macro waggled an accusatory finger at me. "...you are the instrument of their wrath!"

Now, now, sir," I soothed, "a wine bill of a hundred and twenty *denarii* is hardly a sign of divine displeasure. And there were twenty-two people at your dinner party, including the *domina* and yourself."

"Yes, but damn and blast, Anthus. Forty *sextarii* of Falernian! We drank *forty*?"

"You did, sir. Your guests were much enjoying themselves, as they always do, of course, hosted by the gracious lady Ennia Naevia and yourself." I inclined my head unctuously.

Macro sighed in mock resignation. "Very well, Anthus, I'll say no more on the matter, damn me for the soft-hearted fool I am. But mark you this..." Again, the waggling finger. "...when the 'gracious lady Ennia' and myself have been driven destitute into the streets, we'll have *you* to thank for it!"

I again inclined my head, not in acknowledgment of my plot to reduce him to penury, but rather that our daily discussion of household affairs was concluded.

Actually, my master is a reasonable and intelligent man, but he relishes putting on an act such as blustering over household finances. His name is Quintus Naevius Cordus Sutorius Macro and he's the Prefect of the City Watch, in command of Rome's seven thousand fire fighters, the *vigiles*. He's more than that, though, because he also heads the police force, the Urban Cohorts, which number four thousand men. Normally the police come under the City Prefect, a distinguished general and ex-consul named Lucius Calpurnius Piso. But Piso is aging and, so they say, inclined toward the wine cup. So the emperor eased his burden a few years ago by assigning the police responsibility to Macro.

I'm Quintus Sutorius Anthus, steward of the Macro household. My name tells you that I'm the freedman of Macro. Not quite three years ago he granted my freedom—no, that's not true. My manumission was purchased, but the price Macro made me pay was trifling. In true Macro style he said it was all I was worth. At the same time, he permitted me to buy the freedom of Petronia, our chef's assistant, also for a token sum. She's now Sutoria Petronia and my wife.

Petronia's Slavic accent renders her barely intelligible when she's angry or excited, which is often enough. She was one of a few thousand taken as slaves in reprisal for some small uprising in Pannonia seven years ago. She was nineteen then. She'd only been in Rome a few days when our *domina*, lady Ennia, in search of a new scullery maid, purchased her at a slave auction.

We're a contrast, Petronia and me. She's short, a little over five feet, with black hair, dark brown eyes, and a swarthy skin. I'm quite fair—blond, blue-eyed, and about average height, five foot four. I suppose my coloring comes from being a Briton. I'm Roman born but my parents were British—slaves who came to Rome in the retinue of a British kinglet who was petitioning Augustus Caesar for help in fighting various other British kings.

I was born in the year of Augustus Caesar's twelfth consulship, which makes me thirty-three. When I was six my mother and I were sold to a wealthy family that treated us well and afforded me a good education. My father had run away earlier, and we learned later he'd died while serving with the army in Moesia.

When I was eighteen my mother, my master and his wife all died of a fever which swept the city that year. My master's heirs, having no need of my services, sold me. Macro purchased me for nine thousand *denarii*—a fairly rich sum, but I was a trained household administrative slave,

young and in good health. He's been assuring me ever since that Minerva, goddess of wisdom, deserted him that day, that he should have put his money into grain futures instead—and that it marked the start of his descent into poverty through my mismanagement.

After we were freed, Macro asked me to remain as his household major-domo and Petronia to continue as our chef's assistant. She'd been promoted from scullery maid a year or so earlier. We agreed readily. I'd been Macro's scribe and accountant for twelve years and his household steward for the last six and had no wish to move elsewhere. So now we're paid for the work we performed as slaves and have two comfortable rooms for private quarters with all our meals provided.

When Macro plays the master and servant scene with me, you might say that his bark is worse than his bite. Now there's a rather apt expression—and right off my tongue without thinking about it. If I say so myself, I do have a way with words. Actually, I'm compiling a list of my cleverer utterances with the intention of writing a treatise some day for the use of scholars and those who admire the literary form.

But I was speaking of Macro. How shall I describe him? To say that he's tall, five feet nine—heavy set, large brown eyes, aquiline nose, and dark hair, cut short and turning gray—the physical description says nothing of the man himself. I've mentioned that he indulges himself in theatrics, such as his pretense of outrage over the wine bill for his party. And he professes a sophisticated palate, but truth be told, he wouldn't know a top quality Picene from ordinary table wine. However, if it pleases him to praise and condemn, where's the harm?

He's not really a bully, yet he bullies me something terrible. "Damn your alien hide!" he'd rant at me when I was his slave, followed by accusations of graft, indolence, and general dereliction of duty. Macro doesn't damn my alien hide anymore and I miss it. He says it isn't proper to curse one of his freedmen. But that doesn't stop him from imploring the gods to transmute me into a songbird or some such creature which would prove more useful to his household. None of this worries me. I'll be concerned if he ceases his badgering; it's his way of expressing familiarity. After fifteen years of being his closest servant, he trusts me. And confides in me.

As for me, I'm happy in his service. Being steward to a Prefect of Rome has its advantages and I meet many interesting and influential people. Macro is an *eques*, a member of the knightly order. Knights may be lower on the social scale than patricians, but there aren't that many patrician families left these days. And the knights dominate the senate and control most of Rome's wealth.

So, my master wears the gold ring and narrow purple stripe of a knight, has a position of much authority, and possesses considerable wealth. His wife, Ennia, brought money to the marriage. The financial qualification for the knightly class is four hundred thousand *sesterces* and believe me, Macro qualifies many times over. The million *sesterces* required for senate eligibility would be of small consequence to Macro. How do I know? Well, I'm his accountant, of course.

Why does he confide in me? I'd say it's because he needs someone to listen whenever he must release his emotions—what the Greeks call *katharsis*. I mean someone other than his social peers. The aristocrats are judicious about whom they talk to and what they say these days. There are *delatores* everywhere, paid informers eager to report real or imagined acts of disloyalty to the state. The wealthy and high-born daren't sneeze in public lest the act be interpreted as blasphemy or treason, as witnessed by some grocer's assistant.

The command of eleven thousand men—the equivalent of two legions—and the

responsibility of policing and fire fighting in a city of more than a million people is surely a strain on Macro. So once or twice a week he'll send for me, deplore my inefficiency, and then tell me how his day has gone while we demolish two or three *sextarii* of wine.

I'll tell you this, though. My master won't always be a junior prefect of Rome. He has his eye on the praetorian prefecture. The commander of the Praetorian Guard is the most powerful person in Rome, more so than the First of the Senators or the City Prefect, old Calpurnius Piso. That's not how it's supposed to be, but Tiberius Caesar has granted sweeping authority to his Praetorian Prefect, Lucius Aelius Sejanus. Caesar has resided in Capreae almost three years now and in his absence from the city, Sejanus has been virtually co-regent of the empire.

But I'm sure that Macro will succeed to the praetorian post and go even further. Consul or provincial governor, they're not out of the question. My master is on the way up; he has the ear of the emperor and cultivates the right people. In the meantime, he pays lip service to Sejanus.

The aristocrats wonder why the emperor doesn't remove Sejanus from office. Surely, they say, Tiberius must be aware of the erosion of imperial authority during his three years of self-imposed exile in Capreae. The political concerns of my master and his friends are no secret from me. Fifteen years service in the house of Macro have taught me how to blend into the background when aristocratic tongues are loosened with wine.

I wonder myself why Tiberius does nothing to curb the excesses of his Praetorian Prefect. Could he be waiting for some propitious moment to deal with Sejanus? And, in the meantime, giving him enough rope to hang himself? Soon the Sejanus star will be waning, let us hope.

Evocative phrases, those—'enough rope' and 'star waning.' The Muse must have gifted me at birth.

Yes, indeed, we live in interesting times. And I'm well aware of my fortunate position as the steward and confidant of a Roman aristocrat on the ascendancy. I'm happy in my work and contented with my domestic life. But, you know, things *are* a little dull at times.

CHAPTER II

"Must she be present?" Surely I can talk to my sister without a slave in attendance." Gaius Quintus glanced at the middle-aged woman who sat in a far corner of the room, looking at her hands which were folded in her lap.

Serena Hateria stared coldly at the man sitting across the table. "I am devastated. To think that the conventions of the House of the Vestals fail to meet your approval. I shall indeed request the Chief Vestal to petition the *pontifex maximus* to have them revised."

"Serena, there's no need to..."

"And," she interrupted, "I am not your sister. Unfortunately, you have the legal right to bear the name, but you are not a Haterian by birth!"

No, I'm not your sibling, he thought, nor born with your arrogant patrician blood. But I'm the adopted son of your sanctimonious, miserable family and that means I'm legally a patrician—and, oh, how that rankles you, Serena the virgin! Thirty-two and still a virgin. What you need is a man to take charge of you. But who'd want a smug, sour bitch like you in bed? Your wealth would attract a few, though. You can marry in seven years when your Vestal office is completed unless you remain a priestess. In the meantime, you're one of the richest women in Rome and no doubt growing wealthier each day with your investments.

"If it displeases you to be called 'sister,' I'll not do so, Serena." He smiled placatingly. "I know we aren't as close as I would wish. After all, you've been in the House of the Vestals since you were nine. Your induction as a priestess was a glorious honor to the Haterius clan. I'm proud that my adoptive sister is a member of the sacred sorority which tends the hearth of Rome."

He bent his head respectfully. A priestess is scourged if she permits the sacred fire to go out. How delightful, should the flame expire while this bitch is in attendance!

"To hear you, Gaius, one might believe I'd led a life of seclusion and scarcely know you. I was six when my father brought you into his house and I lived under the same roof as you for more than three years. I well recall you as mean-spirited, self-indulgent, obsequious to my father but abusing his servants behind his back."

"I was but a child, Serena, a year or two older than you. Surely, you..."

"A child. Yes. And had you achieved maturity with age, your childhood years would have been overlooked. But did you change, Gaius? Not one bit. You've brought disgrace to my family name, both man and boy. And the man's deeds are worse than the child's."

Smiling weakly, he shrugged. "Very well, Serena, I know I've behaved foolishly in the past. But I am trying now and...oh, Serena, why must we talk like this? I didn't come here to quarrel."

"The tone was set by yourself when you remarked upon the presence of a servant—an uncalled-for comment observing that this is not your residence. Now tell me your reason for coming here. I doubt it was to inquire after my health."

He looked again at the slave who still gazed at her lap. "If it'll put you at ease," Serena said, "she doesn't speak Greek." They had been talking in that language as was the custom of educated Romans in social discourse.

"I've had some bad luck, Serena. I invested, along with some friends...a bottomry loan to the owner of an Egyptian grain ship. The ship went down at sea. We lost everything."

"Everything? Had you no state insurance?"

He shrugged despondently. "No. The weather is good this time of year and piracy is rare on the Alexandrian trade routes."

"You're a fool, Gaius! And your so-called friends, whoever they might be—the late-night drinking set, no doubt, with grandiose schemes of wealth without work. And cease that ridiculous shrugging! How large was your loss?"

"Forty thousand *sesterces*—all I had. Eight thousand of it was a loan I needed to make up the forty thousand. The loan is overdue, and the moneylender is threatening action."

"Splendid! Simply splendid! As always, you proceed from one triumph to another," she said.

Just look at him, she thought. His wan smile and resigned tone of voice, his pathetic role of beleaguered victim of undeserved fate. Is he so stupid as to believe he can dupe me? Did he actually lose his investment in an uninsured shipping loan? He's quite capable of confusing measured speculation with rash impetuosity. And how many times did father pay his debts in the past for the honor of the family name?

"Please, Serena, your sarcasm is salt in my wound. I'm downhearted enough already."

"Then we shall talk plainly. You've come to ask for money. Three years ago, my father left you five hundred thousand *sesterces* in his will. Enough money to support a skilled artisan and his family for twenty years and more than enough to qualify you financially for readmission to the equestrian order. Or does the purple stripe of a knight no longer appeal to you, having previously lost such status through your prodigality?"

The sadistic bitch is enjoying this, he thought. And I have to accept her insults with a smile because she's my last resort.

"I was born into a knightly family and adopted by a patrician one," Gaius replied. "Of course I wish to regain my place as an *eques* of Rome. I would have petitioned before, but I'd hoped to increase my assets through investment before so doing."

"And we know how that turned out, don't we?" she said. "However, I'll not ask how you managed to spend half a million *sesterces* in less than two years. Your debt is the immediate concern. I shall give you ten thousand *sesterces*. After you've paid your debt, you'll have enough left to keep you for several months while you seek more gainful employment. In two days time see the banker Titus Fronto in the Basilica Aemilia. I shall authorize him to release the money. I do this for the sake of the family name, not for you."

"I'm grateful, Serena. I shall repay you as soon..."

"Spare me such drivel," she snapped. "I am granting you the money, not loaning it. I'm not so naive as to think you'd ever repay a loan."

Before he could speak, she arose and called to the slave. "Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus is leaving now. Escort him to the outer gate." With a final contemptuous glance at him, she walked from the reception room.

Gaius ignored the courteous bow of the slave as she opened the gate for him. He strode past the adjoining white rotunda which housed the shrine and sacred storehouse of Vesta and passed under the Arch of Augustus into the Forum Romanum. The hot July sun was at its zenith at the end of the sixth day hour and he felt the warmth of the pavement through the soles of his sandals.

Perspiring beneath his woolen toga, he kept to the left side of the forum, seeking the shade of the Basilica Julia. But a call at the *Atrium Vestae* demanded the formality of a toga.

And what did such formal courtesy earn me? Gaius seethed. Abusive, demeaning treatment from that haughty sow. She'd been graciously pleased to give me ten thousand *sesterces*...and an admonition of improve my ways! More fool I, to have told her I owed eight thousand to that stinking, camel-dung moneylender. I should have told her ten times that—she'd have paid that much for the 'honor of the family name.' No, perhaps I'm wrong. She's too clever for that. Ten thousand is small coin to her, but anything beyond that, I'm sure she'd send for the moneylender

and confirm the facts. She'd get the facts, too. There isn't a merchant or businessman in Rome who'd try any shiftiness with a woman under the *potestas* of the emperor. The Vestals have dignity and authority enough in their own right, never mind Tiberius Caesar being their guardian.

At the northwestern end of the forum, he cut across to his right, passing between the Curia and the ancient Temple of Concord, now a museum. A few minutes walk along the gentle rise of the Street of the Silversmiths brought him to a tavern on the ground floor of a six-story *insula*. Dozens of wooden balconies projected over the narrow street, almost touching those of the apartment building across the way. Gaius lived here, in one room at the back of the third floor. His window overlooked the rear courtyard which accommodated the tavern's outdoor latrine.

The tavern interior was murky after the bright sunlight, but his eyes adapted quickly to the gloom. To his relief, it was cool.

A dozen men sat in scattered groups, chattering loudly as they ate their bread and cheese. "Well, aren't we all dressed up today!" one of them called out good-naturedly. "What's the occasion, Gaius Quintus? Having lunch with the Urban Prefect, are you?"

The others laughed, some nodding at Gaius, who had sat at a table alone. He was well known to them and accepted, even if he was their social superior. They knew vaguely that he was the adopted son of Quintus Haterius, the renowned orator and ex-consul, and that since the old man's death a few years ago, he'd fallen on bad times. But an impoverished patrician wasn't exactly a rarity. Anyway, Gaius seemed a decent enough fellow, never put on fancy airs.

"Thought I'd lend a touch of class to the place, Lucius," Gaius replied. "Actually, I've been addressing the senate. I urged it to close down the chariot races and drinking establishments, make Rome a more sober and pious place."

As the assembly roared in merriment, shaking their heads admiringly at such wit, the tavern-keeper approached and sat at Gaius's table. "A word with you, Gaius Quintus?"

"Corax, if you're concerned about my account," Gaius said, his voice low, "I'll settle it in two days time. I've just come from my banker, seeing about an investment dividend that's due then."

Sighing, he raised his left arm, draped in white. "Why else would I wear this on such a warm day, other than to impress a basilica financier with my conservative good taste?"

Corax chuckled. "You wasn't really addressing the senate, hey?" Looking over his shoulder to ensure not being overheard, he said, "There was two men here earlier this morning, looking for you, Gaius Quintus. Thugs. I know one of them by reputation—Linus Boter, fat bastard what was booted out of the police, year or so ago. The Urban Cohorts must have had good reason to discharge him. Anyway, him and his mate are bully boys, work for the debt collectors and such."

Gaius raised his eyebrows languidly, trying to mask his alarm. "I wonder why?"

"The mouthy one, Linus, he said to tell you that a certain gentleman at the Basilica Julia wants to see you and that you'd know who he is." Corax looked embarrassed. "I said I'd tell you if I saw you. And the other one, tall mean brute with a broken nose, he said I'd better damn well make it my business to see you. They knew you live here in the *insula*."

"I think I know what it's about. Nothing important. I'll attend to it later." Gaius sprawled back leisurely. "And if my credit remains intact, Corax, I'd like a pitcher of wine."

Munching on cold sausage, bread and cheese, Gaius brooded over his ill-starred visit to Serena, still seeing her cold face and hearing the contempt in her voice. The miserly, rotten bitch! Ten thousand *sesterces*, grudgingly parted with for the sake of the family honor. I piss on the family honor! Left me a half million in his will, yes. And what did he leave Serena? Sixty million plus the family home, six or seven apartment buildings and three rural estates with the three or four hundred slaves it takes to work them. At age nine she received a state endowment of two

million *sesterces* when she became a Vestal—which her father invested for her. She's probably worth a hundred million by now, what with rental, investment, and estate income. And the bitch gives me ten thousand! The old man left that much to each of the slaves he freed in his will, almost a hundred of them.

Ascending the grimy steps of the foul-smelling stairwell, he thought of the spaciousness of the *Atrium Vestae*, an immense edifice with expensive furnishings, occupied by six Vestals and their servants while he dwelt like a pig in one small room. The House of the Vestals had a hint of floral fragrance; his residence had fragrance, too—urine and vomit, rancid oil, and tainted fish.

He carefully removed his toga, folding it neatly and placing it in a wooden chest. "I once had a dozen like you," he addressed the toga, "and a wardrobe slave. It took him ten minutes to drape a toga to his satisfaction. But now I must carry you to a tailor shop where some garlic-stinking *vestiarius* charges a *sestertius* to drape you sloppily in one minute."

Gaius sat on the chest, looking about the bleak room. Yes, he thought, when I told them I'd addressed the senate, they laughed, and I laughed with them. Is it really such a jest? My father was a magistrate, destined for the senate; my adoptive father, a consul. By birth and breeding I have the right to wear the broad stripe of a senator. But now I don't even qualify for the narrow stripe of a knight. Because that accursed woman has the family wealth which should be mine! And what will she do with it? Nothing! Except watch it grow. If she marries at the completion of her Vestal service, her husband will be one of Rome's richest men. If she dies unmarried, the imperial treasury will acquire her estate. Either way, I receive nothing. As I received relatively nothing in the will of Quintus Haterius.

Will? Perhaps that's something worth looking into. The Vestals are privileged to make their own wills, something denied most other women. I wonder, does Serena Hateria have a will?



After her lunch of chicken broth and melon, Serena Hateria went to her private chambers and summoned a servant. "Dispatch the courier to the office of Titus Fronto, the banker in the forum," she instructed. "Advise him that I shall call at his office during the ninth hour this afternoon. The lictor is to accompany me. The *ornatrix* is to attend me at once."

Waiting for the hairdresser, she reviewed the tasks she had overseen since arising at first light. The *virgo vestalis maxima* was away on personal business for several days and Serena Hateria, as next senior priestess, was performing the Chief Vestal's duties.

The daily prayer for the welfare of Rome had been made. Oil and wine had been poured on the altar of Vesta prior to the ritual sacrifice of a salt cake in the sacred fire. The shrine floor had been swept and sprinkled with water drawn that morning from the sacred spring of Egeria. Then she had inspected the storeroom of the Sacred Objects of Rome, her head covered in respect by her *suffibulum*, a white, blue-bordered cloth. Chief among the sacred objects under the Vestals' guardianship was the Palladium, the rude, archaic wooden statue of Pallas, brought from Troy by the great ancestor of the Romans, Aeneas. It was so sacred it was never displayed in public.

Lastly, she had inspected the will depository, accompanied by its custodian, Marcia Renata. The depository, a room located next to the sacred objects, contained more than a thousand wills sealed in tubular *capsae* and racked on shelves that covered three walls.

Marcia seemed distracted this morning, Serena thought. And I'm sure I heard her weeping in her room last night. Something preys on her mind, that I know. Her family? She confided in me a year ago about her father's financial misfortunes. And how she'd assisted him. I know the *Renati*

are no longer wealthy. Are they still plagued by creditors? If so, perhaps I can help. But I sense that something else is troubling Marcia. I shall talk with her. Tonight.

Serena remained silent while her house tunic was removed by the *ornatrix*, a middle-aged freedwoman who had been an *Atrium Vestae* servant for twenty years. She had attended daily to Serena's wardrobe and hair from the time Serena was a nine-year-old *virguncula* priestess in training. But Serena didn't believe in chatting freely with house servants. She always gave the hairdresser a twenty-five *denarii* gold piece during Saturnalia. That was sufficient acknowledgment of the woman without having to engage her in gossip.

The servant helped her into a floor length sleeveless tunic and girdled her just below the breasts with a broad purple band. A *pallium*, a flowing white outer mantle was then wrapped about her in several folds, not unlike a man's toga.

The hairdressing came last so that its ornate design wouldn't be disturbed by the tunic being lowered over the head. A towel covering her shoulders, Serena's dark brown hair was combed and brushed, then gathered with a gold brooch at the nape of her neck. There was no restriction on the Vestals' hair length and Serena's gleaming tresses hung a foot below the brooch. Next the hairdresser affixed six pads of artificial hair, pinning them in symmetrical layers. These she bound with ropes of white twisted wool, the ends looped gracefully to rest on each shoulder.

Serena inspected her hair in a polished bronze hand mirror. It was satisfactory. "Thank you. You may go," she said.

A half hour remaining before she would depart for the banker's office, she went into the peristyle. The large, open air colonnaded courtyard in the center of the Vestals' residence was her favorite place. Since childhood she'd known its lawns, shrubs, and flowers; marble and bronze statues and the two goldfish ponds with their gurgling fountains.

Seated in the shade of the portico, she watched silvery water spout from the mouth of a small bronze dolphin, splashing softly into the blue tiled catch basin. She thought of Gaius.

Perhaps I was too abrupt with him this morning. But he's brought his misfortune upon himself. He had every advantage in life but wantonly abused the privilege. Father had great plans for him. With no son of his own, he adopted Gaius to continue the family name. A pity that father didn't adopt some other youth, but Gaius's father was his friend. At sixteen, when he assumed the toga of manhood, Gaius was enrolled by the Censor as an *eques*, by right of birth and patrician adoption. And father gave him one million *sesterces*.

Yes, she reflected bitterly, one million. And by the time he was twenty-one he'd spent his fortune, forfeited his knightly status, and been dismissed from the army while still a cadet. Until then, father had tried to excuse Gaius's dissoluteness as the excesses of youth. But no longer. He realized that Gaius would never ascend the *cursus honorum*, or even try. Father gave him an annual allowance of twenty-five thousand *sesterces* and never spoke to him again.

Look at him now, living in penury, judging by the shabbiness of his toga and sandals. Whining about his bad luck. Bad luck indeed! Chiefly at the races, I dare say. To think that he would be a wealthy man and a senator with consular prospects, had he conducted himself honorably. Father would have left me a decent bequest but the estate would have gone to Gaius to ensure that the Haterian family rites would continue. No, upon reflection, I don't believe that I was too abrupt with him at all.

CHAPTER III

"You seem less than enthused," Macro said. "I know that long-suffering look of yours, damn me if I don't!"

"Well, yes and no, sir," I hedged. "Your suggestion is excellent. A life-size statue in the *triclinium* would be most appropriate, indeed, sir. But...Mars Ultor, sir? In his aspect as the Avenger, the god must appear in military vestment and it may be deemed by some to give a, shall we say, discordant tone to the dining room."

I'd just completed my evening briefing to my master when he announced that he wished to have a statue placed in a corner of the dining room to complement the large mural, a banquet scene, which covered one wall. Macro's artistic sensibility is basic at best, and he requires discreet guidance in such matters. Fortunately, he has my superbly refined taste at his disposal, reluctant as he is to acknowledge it.

"What?" he roared. "Discordant! You, my own freedman and household steward, you say that of the great Mars?"

"Oh, sir!" I feigned shock at so grievous a charge. "Never, not ever would I utter disparagement of the divine Olympian, protector of the state, father of Romulus and great progenitor of Rome itself, he who smiles with favor upon the far-flung legions of Rome. Never, sir!"

A bit of a mouthful, all that; but Macro enjoys a well-rounded statement and I'm always willing to oblige.

"What I'm suggesting, sir, is that the god in his warlike aspect might be displayed to better advantage in some other location, the theme of battle being in contradistinction to the atmosphere of languid, sensual pleasure which is the essence of the *triclinium*."

"Ump," Macro responded skeptically, but I could see that he was pondering the matter. I resorted to guile, not being above a touch of cunning in the manipulation of my master.

"Now then, sir, you take the divine Augustus of happy memory. We know that two of his most revered gods were Mars and Apollo." I knew that Macro had admired the mortal Augustus Caesar and now idolized the late emperor to whom the senate and people of Rome had granted godhead. "After Mars had favored him with military supremacy and the civil wars had ended, the divine Augustus sought the blessing of Apollo, god of peace, healing and tranquility. He knew that Rome, war-weary, rudely sapped of its..."

"I hesitate to disrupt your dissertation, Anthus," Macro said, "but get to the damned point!"

"Indeed, sir. May one suggest that a statue of Mars Ultor be positioned in the *atrium* and one of Apollo in the *triclinium*. Thus, upon their arrival, your guests would first observe the dauntless, unyielding visage of Mars, imparting to them that this house stands for firmness of action, truth, duty, and valor. Then, when they proceeded into the dining room, they would behold the gentle features of Apollo, revealing a complementary aspect of the house—Apollo the healer, god of peace, god of music—and, like great Mars, an Olympian. 'Ah, yes,' your guests would say, 'the house of Sutorius Macro subscribes to unsleeping vigilance over the honor of Rome but strives toward harmony, peace and concord.'"

Macro's 'ump' was grudging this time rather than skeptical.

"As one who has served this honorable house for many years," I continued, "might I suggest that your family motto, should you choose to adopt one, could well be 'gentle in manner, forthright in action'? How better to state the ruling principle of the house of Sutorius Macro?"

I rather liked that myself. As I may have mentioned, I have a way with the polished phrase. Macro and I had been talking in Greek, as we always do, but I think my 'gentle in manner' sounds much better in Latin. '*Suavitor in modo, fortiter in re.*' Its dactylic meter has a certain charm, does it not?

Macro reached for the wine pitcher and filled the two cups on the table at which we sat. Picking up one, he offered me the other with a wordless gesture He gulped a large measure, declared it utterly undrinkable, taxed me with being in league with the knave of a wine merchant who had supplied such vinegar, then refilled his cup. I refrained from telling him the wine was an excellent Sabine and that our wine merchant was Crispus, caterer to the city's wealthy and noble houses. He already knew all that.

"Apollo, eh? Well, perhaps you're right," he allowed. "The concept of the growth of civilization under the protective aegis of armed vigilance. Yes, good stuff, that. Sometimes, Anthus, you come up with a worthwhile suggestion. Not often, mind you, but occasionally."

"You are too kind, sir."

"Oh, very well, then. Two statues, Anthus. So, tell me what this is going to cost."

"It depends, sir. Life-size and either marble or bronze. Plaster stucco would be *infra dignitatem*, don't you agree?" I cleared my throat. "At least two hundred gold pieces each. Ungilded."

He accepted my estimate of forty thousand *sesterces* without turning a hair.



When I set out a few days later to get price quotations for the statues, I took young Rufinus with me. He's ten years old, a slave acquired by Macro three years ago.

Rufinus had been sold by his drunken, ne'er-do-well father to a loutish acquaintance who'd badly maltreated the child. On the street one day, Macro encountered Rufinus being terribly beaten by his master. Macro arrested the man on a charge of public impiety. A small temple of Flora or Fortunas, or whoever, was close by and the goddess would have been affronted at such behavior in her proximity. Macro brought the boy home with him after Rufinus' master had been lodged in a cell overnight. The next morning Macro dropped the charge of impiety conditional on the man selling the boy to Macro, an offer which the prisoner couldn't refuse.

After the bill of sale had been executed, Macro and a couple of his *vigiles* escorted the man to his wretched tenement where they inspected it for fire safety. Finding one of the fire buckets nearly empty, Macro had the man publicly flogged and fined him the exact amount he'd been paid as Rufinus' slave price.

So that's how we gained a seven-year-old boy slave. At the time, it was something I could have done without. I had enough responsibilities without a child to train. But in spite of his unhappy background, the boy proved cheerful and willing and before long had become a favorite in the household. Macro, true to form, pretended to forget the boy's name but he showed in many ways that he was quite fond of little Rufinus.

I assigned the boy small tasks and did my best to educate him in his general duties. Then, at the time that Macro freed Petronia and me, he decreed that Rufinus was to attend school full-time. In that respect, he's following in my footsteps. When I was his age, my master, a wealthy grain merchant, sent me to school with his grandson. I may have mentioned that before.

Rufinus attends a private academy run by Lucius Orbilius Pupillus, whose family have been renowned school masters in Rome for about a hundred years. At present he's under the tutelage

of Chilon, a *magister* who teaches him reading, writing, Greek, mathematics, geography, and speech. At his present progress, next year the boy will be taught by Orbilius himself, a *grammaticus*, who will refine what basics his student has already learned and teach him literary composition, rhetoric, and history.

The morning was warm when Rufinus and I left the house well into the sixth daylight hour. The sculptor's shop I intended to visit was in the Velabrum, an area between the Forum Romanum and the starting-gate end of the Circus Maximus, crowded with artisans, small factories, and open-air markets.

The Macro residence is in one of the city's more affluent districts, the Quirinal. I took a route to the Velabrum which led through the forum, thinking it would be a treat for Rufinus, as well as educational. I enjoy the Forum Romanum myself, with its magnificent edifices and bustle. After all, it is the heart of Rome and therefore the focal point of the empire.

We approached the forum from its northerly end and, as we drew near the Mamertine jail at the foot of the Street of the Silversmiths, a man strode toward us from the other direction. Thinking him someone of importance by his self-assured stride and the fact that he wore a toga—on such muggy days most people wear loose tunics—I drew Rufinus to the side of the narrow street. My deference was wasted; as he swept past, I noted that his undertunic bore no purple stripe of any aristocratic class and his toga, badly draped, was a shoddy affair. His sweat-glistened face was ugly with inner rage, and I swear that I heard him snarl 'stinking bitch' to himself as he passed us.

Moments later we were in the forum, the boy burbling with happy excitement. I pointed out the various buildings to him: the Curia where the senate meets, temples, the two basilicas, the speakers' rostra, the temple of Saturn that houses the imperial treasury, the Sacred Way. But what took his fancy most was the Golden Milestone. Erected by Augustus some fifty years ago, the *milliarium aureum* is a tall column close to the temple of Saturn. On it, inscribed in gilded bronze, are the distances from Rome to the chief cities of the empire. I suppose it intrigued the boy because he's been studying geography in school lately. A waste of time, to my mind! I have scant regard for the school curricula of today. Is it any wonder that children appear to know so little? Now, when I was a student, things were different. None of this modern nonsense!

We left the forum by Tuscan Street, a road which exits the forum between the Basilica Julia and the Temple of Castor and Pollux. It leads to the Circus Maximus and connects with Velabrum Street, our destination. As a special treat, I'd promised the boy a meal in a hot food shop, of which there were several in the area.

When we entered the shop, his eyes rounded with wonder at the sight of so much food simmering in heated urns set into the long stone counters. For all of his ten years he'd eaten whatever was set before him, which was probably very little before he joined our household. Confronted by such an array, Rufinus found it difficult to choose and agreed to my suggestion of roast chicken with pumpkin dressing. I should have had the same; my fig-fed pork liver was nothing to wax poetic over. But first we had spiced barley soup with flatbread and olives; later, the boy had melon and two large, iced pastries.

Our table was beside a street window, so we had a good view of the outside activity, the shutters removed on such a fine day. Two jugglers performed across the street, to the boy's delight. They looked Egyptian or Numidian...perhaps Neapolitan? Macro says that Neapolis is nothing more than Africa's northmost port, its inhabitants lacking in scruples, taste, and the basic decencies. But then, he says that of any place more than a hundred miles from Rome. When we left the shop, I gave Rufinus a *sestertius* to put in the jugglers' wooden bowl, which he

did, blushing self-consciously.

It was a short walk to the Velabrum area where the workshops of the *sculptores* clustered close to the south slope of the Capitoline hill. A few minutes later we were in the shop of one Iktinos, master sculptor. He'd been recommended by an acquaintance of mine, Titus Calpurnius Siculus, a bucolic poet, as yet unknown.

Iktinos, Greek by name and appearance, seemed pleased when I addressed him in his native tongue, although I must say he had a deplorable Thessalian accent. When I informed him of my master's wishes, he lauded Macro's peerless discernment. "Such apt juxtaposition of Mars and Apollo, a silent statement of the twin motivations which engendered the greatness of Rome," he said. And so forth. Perhaps I'm unfair, but I suspect the same admiration would have welled worth had Macro decreed statues of a street sweeper and a fishmonger.

"Mars and Apollo," the sculptor breathed reverently, "most appropriate to the noble house of Sutorius Macro, all honor to his name."

I didn't bother telling him that the Macro household is not a noble establishment, boasting no consuls in its history. Truth be known, Macro is descended from a slave grandfather, as are many of Rome's wealthy and influential citizens.

"But," Iktinos continued, "the attributes?"

"Ah, yes, the attributes, of course," said I. "Yes, indeed."

"Very important, the attributes, are they not?" the sculptor asked, though it was more a decree than a query.

"Well, now." I hedged, hoping to cloak my ignorance of the subject. "What is your professional opinion?"

Rufinus, who had been standing aside listening, piped up. "Excuse me, sir," he addressed Iktinos, "but if Mars is to be shown in his guise as Ultor the Avenger, his chief attributes should be the spear and the torch."

The sculptor looked sharply at him. "Who are you, boy?"

Before the lad could answer I said, "This is Rufinus, a member of the household. I brought him with me to, um, broaden his education." I didn't clarify the boy's slave status, hoping Iktinos might think him a family member. Which he seemed to do, for he smiled and said, "You seem to know something of the gods, young master. Can you tell me more, eh?"

"Yes, sir," Rufinus cheerfully obliged. "I think Mars should be bearded. For many centuries he was presented as clean shaven, but the statues erected by the divine Augustus show him bearded and that's what's currently in favor."

"The boy's right, you know," Iktinos said to me approvingly. "Speaks Greek quite well for a schoolboy, too."

I told him Rufinus had only studied Greek for three years but that we spoke it at home. By 'we' I referred to Macro and myself but left the sculptor with the impression that the entire household chattered endlessly in that language.

"Very well, boy, tell me more about Mars Ultor," Iktinos said.

"A wolf should be crouched at his feet," Rufinus continued eagerly, "because the wolf is the sacred beast of the god. And in the guise of the Avenger, Mars must wear his battle helmet."

"Good, good." The sculptor nodded. "Now then, what do you know about Apollo? You know about him, do you?"

"Oh, yes! Apollo is much favored because the divine Augustus before he was Augustus and was called Octavian saw Apollo in a vision before he and admiral Agrippa won the battle of Actium, and he erected many temples and statues, and the great dictator Cornelius Sulla always

carried an image of Apollo on his campaigns."

"Slow down, boy! Yes, all that's so, but what of Apollo's attributes?"

Rufinus's brow crinkled in thought. "Well, sir, he's the Healer and the Peacemaker and Civilizer. And the Vestal Virgins call him Apollo Doctor in their prayers for the sick. Oh, he's also the god of Music and sometimes he's called Silver Bow because he appears on the field of battle to fight the powers of evil and darkness."

"Yes, yes, boy. All true. But his attributes?"

"The bow, sir, and the lyre. And sometimes a sheaf of wheat because he's also the god of agriculture."

I cleared my throat ostentatiously to remind them of my presence. "An interesting dialogue, which will perhaps assist us in deciding on the, er, attributes of the statues."

For the next several minutes, Iktinos and Rufinus deliberated, paying nominal attention to my occasional comment, but otherwise giving me little heed. They decided that a bronze Mars should be bearded, helmeted, a spear held vertically in his right hand with the butt end on the ground, but no wolf or torch. As Iktinos pointed out, wolf and torch were appropriate to an outdoor figure but in an enclosed space would be a distraction from the central figure of the god. Apollo was to be white marble, nude, with long hair in a topknot. He would hold a bow in his raised left hand, a lyre at his feet.

While the sculptor made a few sketches for my master's consideration, Rufinus and I were given a tour of the establishment. I called it a shop earlier, but 'factory' is more descriptive. There were more than two dozen workers; our guide, a young apprentice, told us that about half of them were slaves. He said that Iktinos manumitted his slaves when he'd determined that they'd returned a profit to him of four times their slave price. The apprentice was a slave himself and looked forward to being a freedman and guild-enrolled artisan by the time he was thirty.

I noticed several of the workers were women. I'd never thought of women as being sculptors; surely their role in life is more suitable to the kitchen, the nursery, or the weaving loom.

We watched a life-size bronze statue being assembled, its fourteen component parts having been cast in a nearby foundry. Smaller pieces such as busts and statuettes were normally of solid metal and I'd presumed until now, without giving it any thought, that the larger ones were the same. But they're hollow, so a bronze statue is lighter and easier to handle than the same size in stone.

Iktinos gave me some rough sketches of how the statues would appear from different aspects and a written price quotation which was reasonably close to that I'd suggested to Macro. I was sure that Macro would be agreeable to both price and design and told the sculptor I'd return in a few days with written confirmation.

Rufinus was delighted when Iktinos gave him a miniature plaster bust of Augustus Caesar, he who had beheld the vision of Apollo before his navy defeated that of Marcus Antonius at Actium, as my learned colleague Rufinus had informed us.

It was close to the end of the eighth daylight hour when we retraced our path back to the forum. On our way through the crowded streets, Rufinus announced he would be a sculptor when he grew up. With Macro's approval, of course.

"But I thought you'd set your mind on being a charioteer."

"Oh, yes, that, too. But on days when I'm not racing, I'll make statues," he explained. "I'll make one of the master and mistress and of Petronia and you, if you'd like."

"Most kind of you. And what will you do in your spare time?" I asked, but he was too busy

gaping at the sights to reply, for we had entered the forum from Tuscan Street. I led the boy toward the arch of Augustus, a short distance to our right.

"You mentioned the battle of Actium," I said, "while you and the sculptor were deciding on the statues' attributes. This arch was erected to commemorate the victory over Antonius. It was built the year after the battle. See, there's the date inscribed on top just below the four-horse chariot group. Year 723 since the Founding of the city, more than fifty years ago."

Actually, the structure is a triple arch with two smaller arches to either side of the large central one. I vaguely recalled they had been added later in commemoration of something or other. Probably the usual victory over some alien tribe, judging by the statuary that adorned them. There seemed no point in mentioning this to the boy. It would only confuse him with too much detail.

"The flanking arches," Rufinus informed me, "were added eleven years later by the senate, to honor Augustus for his part in regaining the legionary standards which Marcus Licinius Crassus lost to the Parthians. The statues on the side arches depict Parthian soldiers presenting the gold eagles to Augustus," he explained carefully. "Augustus was called that then, but when the central arch was erected, he was still Octavianus."

"Oh, very well done." I beamed in avuncular admiration. "Yes, you have that quite correct, Rufinus!"

Is it within the purview of one of the gods to protect us from zealous schoolboys?

As Rufinus gazed in awe at the edifice, clasping the small bust of Augustus to his breast, a lictor appeared beneath the arch. His burly togate figure, the *fasces* resting against his left shoulder, commanded attention as he proceeded at a slow, stately cadence. Behind him walked a tall, aristocratic woman wearing the robe and ceremonial headdress of a Vestal Virgin.

"Rufinus," I whispered, "turn toward this lady and bow your head as she passes."

As they walked by, neither she nor her lictor looked to either side as we inclined our heads respectfully. The crowd cleared a path for them as they proceeded into the open area of the forum, heading toward the Basilica Aemilia. Most people bowed at their approach, but not all. There'll always be disrespectful scum on the fringes of society. But I noted that the impious stood well back from her; her lictor possessed the power of arrest and punishment of those who would slight a guardian of the sacred fire of Rome.

The boy asked me about the Vestals as we walked home. I told him what I knew and impressed upon him that they were among the most respected and privileged women of Rome and under the protection of Caesar himself.

"The priestess looked so unhappy. I felt sorry for her."

An observant child. He'd noted her grave features, just as I had done. Priests and priestesses conventionally assume a sober aspect when in public but the Vestal we'd encountered had much more than that. Distressed, heavy-laden is how I'd describe her expression. Why should one in her position have any troubles to endure?

CHAPTER IV

It was the third night hour and the sun long set, but the sultry heat of the day still lingered in the peristyle. Serena Hateria and Marcia Renata sat on a marble bench close to a goldfish pool. Reflections of a flickering torch on the other side of the courtyard danced on the pool's fountain-rippled surface.

"Answer me, Marcia," Serena said. "You are troubled; don't deny it. We are closer than sisters and I know your moods. You've been wrapped in thought for several days and last night I heard you weeping in your chamber. Tell me."

"You have been my sister for more than twenty years," Marcia said after a brief silence. "I'll tell you, Serena. You'd learn soon enough anyway. But you'll despise me..."

"No. Never that."

"Serena, I'm pregnant." Marcia covered her face with her hands and wept.

Shaken by her friend's words, Serena stared at her in silence, then reached out to touch her shoulder. "Well, now," she said, "we'll have to think about this, won't we?"

Marcia lowered her hands and looked at Serena through streaming eyes. "They'll carry me through the streets," she sobbed, "and people will turn their backs to me. They'll take me to the Colline gate, and I'll be scourged and buried alive!"

"You will not be buried alive. Now, please, keep your voice down."

"My family will be disgraced," Marcia wailed. "They'll be forced to walk in my procession...oh!"

Shocked into silence by Serena's ear-ringing slap, Marcia slumped in despair, sobbing softly.

"That's better. Shrill hysterics are beneath the dignity of a priestess—and a patrician—and more to the point, won't help us resolve your problem by arousing half the city. Now stop snuffling." She took a small soft linen cloth from the fold of her stola. "Here, clean your face with this and listen to me."

"Don't you despise me, Serena? I've defiled the..."

"No, I don't despise you!" Serena interrupted. "Now that I'm over the shock of your news, I consider you to be a complete fool. But what's done is done and whimpering about it won't get you out of the predicament, will it? As for defiling the shrine, as I believe you were about to say, every day Rome witnesses a thousand impieties far worse than yours, yet I don't see the city falling in ruin through the displeasure of the gods. The gods are all powerful and control our destiny, but they're not capricious, vindictive beings."

"But, Serena, I've committed a sacrilege! The law requires that I be punished..."

"You're blubbering again and talking too loudly!" Serena hissed. "And there is no *law* that says you must be executed, and your family humiliated. It's a man-made convention, designed by impious, self-important fools who stroke their hypocritical egos by crying, 'Behold, gods, and look favorably upon us for we are punishing a sinner!' There is no divine decree by Vesta on such things. We have served her for many years and know her as a gentle and caring deity, not some mischievous local demi-god who must be endlessly flattered and cajoled. Vesta is an Olympian, the daughter of Saturn and the sister of Jupiter."

"But I have offended her. She must want me punished." Marcia was no longer weeping but her face crumpled in anguish.

"And perhaps the goddess hasn't taken the time to notice." Serena paused. "How long have you been pregnant?"

"Five weeks."

"Very well, then why hasn't the sacred fire gone out in that period? An impious act by one of us is supposed to be signaled by the altar flame dying, yet somehow it continues to burn."

"I know, Serena. That confused me. When the flame didn't expire, I thought perhaps the goddess had forgiven me. But how could she condone such an act?"

"You seem quite sure that it's five weeks. How so?"

"It was during the week of the Vestalia. I was the shrine's representative at the flute players' annual banquet in the temple of Minerva."

Serena nodded. "Yes, I remember. On the *idus* of June."

The week of June ninth to fifteenth was sacred to Vesta. On the first day married women were permitted to enter the shrine storehouse, barefoot and carrying food offerings. For the rest of the year only the *pontifex maximus* and the Vestal Virgins were allowed entry to that sacred place. The festival week was known also as the 'baker's holiday,' Vesta being the patron goddess of bakers and millers. On the *idus*, the thirteenth day, the flute players guild held its annual banquet, a rowdy event, with prudent citizens remaining in their homes that night.

"It was then," Marcia said. "I'd had more wine than I should have. I'd been talking most of the evening to another guest, a young man whom I'd met several times before at social events. He's not really attractive—tall and gawky, with a bad complexion—but he's well educated and articulate. I suppose I fell under the spell of his conversation...and, well..."

"And he seduced you," said Serena. "Where? Surely not in the temple of Minerva."

"Serena! Certainly not!" Marcia protested, shocked at such an irreverent suggestion. "He asked me to dismiss my lictor and the litter bearers, and said he'd escort me back here in his own litter, that he wanted to continue our conversation. Then he ordered his litter bearers to take us to...to where he lives. He said we'd have a cup of wine to end the evening before he brought me back here."

"What's the name of this silver-tongued but otherwise unattractive person? And where does he live?"

"I can't tell you, Serena, I can't! He's of a very influential family and it would make serious trouble if it were ever known that he...that he...was involved."

How dreadful, Serena thought wryly. Never mind the serious trouble she's in. But my concern is for her, not the odious creature who seduced her knowing full well her position. In any case, I can easily learn his identity if need be. A word to the president of the flute players guild would produce the banquet's guest list quickly enough. She thought with distaste of the arrogant Greek freedman who presided over the guild and assigned the musicians required for Rome's endless sacrificial slaughter of animals. She knew that he treated the *aeditui*, the temple sacristans, with ill manners bordering on contempt. With two exceptions: he knew better than to test the forbearance of the *flamen Dialis* and the *virgo vestalis maxima*. Disrespect in any degree toward the high priest of Jupiter and the Chief Vestal, or her priestesses, would prove unwise.

"Then I won't press the matter, Marcia. I dare say the man concerned isn't about to proclaim the event if for no other reason than to protect himself."

"He doesn't even know, Serena," Marcia said. "I haven't seen him since that night. It was only that one time."

"Very well, we'll forget about him for now. Our immediate concern is you." Serena sat quietly for a moment, thinking. "There's only one thing we can do. The Chief Vestal will be away for another seven or eight days and we must act before her return. I will seek out an abortionist at once. You will remain in your bed, complaining of a general pain in your abdomen and I will

give orders that nobody is to disturb you, neither Vestals nor staff."

Marcia shook her head in a woebegone gesture. "But surely somebody will learn of this. I don't see how we can..."

"We shall fish with a golden hook. Money will buy anything, including silence. And, if my plan works, the only other person to know of your situation will be the physician, who, for a handsome fee and a quiet word in his ear, I am sure will employ the utmost discretion."

"A physician," Marcia said, sagging in relief. "When you said 'abortionist,' I pictured some back-street midwife."

"Certainly not! The very idea! We shall do this properly and openly. Your illness will be made known to the Vestals and the household staff, whatever it is we decide upon after the physician has examined you. That means, of course, most of Rome will know in a day or two, but that's of no matter. Vestals suffer illness just as other people do."

Serena stared vacantly into the pool for a few moments.

"Yes," she said, "the best plan will be for you to be taken by litter to the physician's residence for treatment. Surely at this early stage of pregnancy, he'll require you for only a few days. And when he releases you, you will return here to the *Atrium Vestae*. Your parents are away from the city at present, and I see no need to follow the convention that an ailing Vestal should recover in the house of a married woman. The physician, I am sure, will pronounce you fit to return directly here, perhaps on light duties for a few days."

Unable to speak, Marcia smiled at her friend, the tears in her eyes no longer those of despair. The silence between the two women was broken only by the gentle plash of the fountain in the goldfish pool.



Ashen with terror, Gaius sat up in his bed, wild-eyed, awakened by the thundering on his door. The money-lender's thugs! They'd come for him even though he'd promised the Syrian full repayment of the loan by noon tomorrow!

Again, the door vibrated on its hinges. Trembling, Gaius stumbled from his bed and pulled his tunic over his head. He'd slept naked, the cramped room still muggy at night from the withering daytime heat. He knew by the muted light that it was shortly after sunrise. Heart thudding, he crept to the door. "Who's there?" he croaked, voice tight with fear.

"I have a message for Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus," came a loud reply, "from the reverend lady Serena Hateria."

Gaius hesitated. Was this a trick? "A message?" he rasped. "Tell me what it is then."

"It is written and sealed. I was directed to take your reply back to the reverend lady. However, if you refuse to open your door, I'll return to her and so advise her."

Cautiously Gaius unlocked and opened the door a crack, then blew out his pent breath in relief. A public messenger stood there, the strap of his large leather pouch slung over his shoulder. He studied Gaius briefly. Then, satisfied that Gaius fit the description given by the reverend lady, he removed a sealed *capsa* from the pouch and held it out.

"Your reply need not be written," he said.

Gaius broke the seal on the small cylinder and removed a single sheet of parchment and read it. "Yes," he said, "say that I shall attend her at the hour stated."



The slave was not present this time. Does that have any significance, he wondered, in view of her pointed remarks yesterday about the protocol of the Vestals' domicile? He wore his toga again, thankful that the day was cooler than yesterday.

It was less than two hours since the messenger had battered on his door. In his haste to make himself presentable and have his toga draped by the surly *vestiarious*, he'd had no time to eat. He glanced at a bowl of fresh fruit on a nearby sideboard. You'd think the bitch would offer me some, he thought, but not her!

Why has she summoned me? Make no mistake, it was a summons, not a request. Has she changed her mind about giving me the ten thousand? No, he reflected, it's not her style to act on a whim and, if she had decided against it, she'd probably have told me by message. The less she sees of me, the better, I know.

Serena Hateria came directly to the point. "Since our meeting yesterday I've given further thought to the matter of your self-inflicted dilemma."

Ah, how gracious you are, as always, he thought.

"So, I have a proposal for you. In brief, I will make you a further gift of money and you, in return, will render a certain service to me."

"I am at your service, Serena," he said. "Whatever my means, they are at your disposal."

"Oh, yes? Well, in that case, Gaius, I wish you to find an abortionist for me."

"An abortionist!"

"You needn't look so startled. Yes, an abortionist. But not for me personally, if that's what you're thinking."

"An abortionist..."

"That's twice you've repeated my words. Now listen carefully. A friend of mine, a woman of respected family, behaved indiscreetly in a moment of weakness. Her family doesn't know of her condition. They are away from the city for the summer. I wish to help her. Now, I dare say I could find an abortionist easily enough myself, but it's hardly the kind of thing a priestess should do. Therefore, I wish you to locate one. Immediately! And have him report to me at once. Nor am I thinking of some back-street Egyptian apothecary or charm-seller. I want a professional physician and surgeon, which no doubt means a Greek, observing that the practice of medicine seems beneath the dignity of Latins."

At first jarred by Serena's request, Gaius had recovered his composure. "A physician. Yes, well, I'll make inquiries and see..."

"Yes. Make inquiries at once. This very morning. I wish the physician to call on me no later than noon tomorrow."

"Tomorrow? But Serena..."

"Noon tomorrow. Or shall I seek assistance elsewhere?"

"I'll start at once."

"In return for your service and your future silence on the matter I shall give you ten thousand *sesterces* in addition to the ten thousand already promised. And I'll restore your annual allowance of the two hundred and fifty gold pieces which ceased upon father's death."

For the second time in the space of a minute, Gaius was taken aback. Not at Serena's sudden, unexpected generosity but at such an unforeseen windfall. He bent his head to her. "You are most kind, Serena. I shall try to be worthy of your generosity." He tried to avoid obsequiousness and recalled her stinging scorn of yesterday.

"There is, however," she said, "the condition I stated earlier. The physician must be here by

noon tomorrow. If not, my offer is withdrawn."

"*Omnem movere lapidum,*" Gaius said, arising and bowing to her in farewell.

"Indeed," she said, "leave no stone unturned."

If he does earn his recompense, Serena thought as she watched him leave, I hope the first thing he does is purchase a new toga and sandals.



"I am Kastor, reverend lady. *Medicus, chirurgis* and *ocularius*. I have been told that you wish to see me." The tall, slender, dark bearded man made no physical obeisance, but his tone was courteous and respectful.

Acknowledging him with a fleeting smile, she gestured him to sit beside her on the bench where she and Marcia had sat two days before. She noted his knee-length white woolen tunic with the full-length sleeves which were becoming fashionable, though once considered effeminate. The *filum* of a physician, a thin, red headband, crossed his forehead, containing his short, dark hair.

"You're an oculist as well as a physician and surgeon," she said, wanting to learn something of him before proceeding to the matter at hand.

"I am, lady, and an apothecary also, of course. But I leave the preparation of unguents and potions mostly to my chief assistant. Lady, you may be assured that he's a qualified *medicus*."

"By your name you're Greek, but you speak with a Roman accent. What is your origin?"

"Yes, lady, I am of Greek descent but am Roman born. My family have been in Italy for almost three centuries. In fact, one of my ancestors was a *medicus* on the staff of Publius Cornelius Scipio in Spain when the Carthaginian Hannibal invaded. We have served the legions many times since. As for me, I studied in Corinth and Alexandria, after which I practiced my profession in Campania for several years, mostly in Puteoli. I returned to Rome eight years ago."

This man is acceptable, Serena decided. "Shall we proceed directly to the point of your visit, Kastor? You already know what it is, I presume."

"Yes, lady, your emissary mentioned abortion but gave no further details."

"The woman concerned is a friend of mine, a patrician lady in a delicate situation. I'm the only person who knows of this and shortly you will be the only other. My 'emissary,' as you called him, doesn't know who she is. The man who caused the situation isn't even aware of the pregnancy. I must stress that the entire matter be treated with discretion to the point of absolute secrecy."

"Reverend lady, I am Kastor, *medicus, chirurgis, ocularius*. I am not a traveling quack in a portable booth in the marketplace. When I treat my patients, I do so with complete confidentiality, be they senators or slaves."

"Your professional ethics are beyond question, Kastor. Forgive me if I seemed to doubt them."

He accepted this with an inclination of his head. "And now, lady, if you will advise me where I am to find your friend so that I may examine her and make arrangements, I shall depart."

"I'll conduct you to her myself. It isn't far. You see, Kastor..." she paused, staring directly into his eyes "...my friend is a Vestal Virgin. Now you know why I am so concerned about discretion."

The physician raised his eyebrows and rubbed his chin between thumb and forefinger. "Ah, a Vestal," he said quietly. "But lady, you must be mistaken about her condition. From what you

have described, I'm sure she has an inflammation of the liver."



"I anticipate no problem with her cure, lady," Kastor said. "Apart from her inflammation she appears healthy enough."

Serena Hateria and the physician walked slowly along the row of life-sized statues of former Chief Vestals which faced the open courtyard from under the portico.

"Would it breach your professional conduct to tell me the form of her treatment? I am ignorant of such matters."

The physician paused to study the bronze features of a long dead Chief Vestal.

"Yes, lady, I will tell you. I prefer, usually, not to give details to my patients, as do most reputable physicians, because too often the facts are misunderstood and distorted by laymen. And soon the marketplace is buzzing with the wondrous news of the restorative powers of grape leaf soaked in the spittle of a virgin or of a paste prepared from the ashes of a boar's jaw. And, of course, there are always quacks ready to cater to such ignorance and thereby prosper."

Serena smiled pensively. "My sisters and I know this all too well, Kastor. The pathetic belief so many women hold about the spiritual influence of a Vestal, when we are merely guardians of the sacred fire. Yet these women believe that to touch a Vestal's garment will earn them the divine approval of the goddess."

For the first time, Kastor smiled also, saying, "*Mundus vult decipi...*" and Serena completed the ancient saying for him, "...*et decipiatur*."

"We agree, lady. The world wants to be deceived, so let it then be deceived. But not by such persons as us. Very well, you wish to know of her treatment. Because of the early stage of her gestation, heroic measures are unnecessary. I'll probably give her a large infusion of a potion prepared from either wild carrot seed or pelagium. Both are excellent abortifacients, especially for an early pregnancy. She may be a little weak after she's discharged, perhaps nauseous—but it will only be the result of having little to eat other than weak broth and fruit for a couple of days. It will pass quickly. And if she seems depressed, an emotional reaction to her treatment, that too will pass soon. Three or four days of quiet rest should prove adequate."

"Thank you," she said. "I'll watch her carefully."

"My litter will be here within the hour," Kastor said. "It will carry her to my residence. In the meantime, she is not to eat nor drink. I will commence her treatment this afternoon and she should be ready to return here in three days."

"One thing remains, Kastor. Your fee."

"It varies, lady. For those of little or no wealth, I ask a token payment. But for those in comfortable circumstances my fee is commensurate with my skill and experience."

"Name it, Kastor."

"Twenty *aurii*, lady. That includes my call here, the use of my litter and treatment and maintenance in my residence with an experienced attendant there day and night."

"Twenty gold pieces," she mused. "Physician, you shall be given one hundred...no, don't protest...ten thousand *sesterces* is little enough to pay for her health."

"Your servant, reverend lady," said Kastor.

CHAPTER V

Macro was pleased with the sculptor's sketches of the statues. When he grunted approval at the choice of their attributes, I refrained from mentioning that the chief agent in their selection had been his ten-year-old boy slave. Nor did he question the sculptor's fee of twenty thousand *sesterces*. That led him, however, to wonder aloud over the size of my kick-back from the sculptor, which led in turn to asserting that, damn him for a soft-hearted fool, he really should place the lad Rufinus in charge of the household and assign me to lesser duties.

At his mention of Rufinus I told him I'd taken the boy with me to the Velabrum and that Iktinos the sculptor, impressed by the boy's courtesy, had given him a small bust of Augustus.

"He's eager to show it to you, sir. But he knows better than to bother you. He's placed the bust on the shelf by his bed, beside the little toy chariot you gave him a few years ago."

"Bring the lad with you tomorrow evening," Macro said. "Never too soon to start him on the right path, eh? I'll tell him about Augustus, especially the battle of Actium and the defeat of Antonius and his Egyptian whore, whatshername? Clytemnestra."

Macro knows full well that the last Macedonian queen of Egypt was Cleopatra but it's part of his act to forget or confuse names.

"And you might consider taking him to the forum and pointing out the sights. The arch of Augustus, the Golden Milestone, that sort of thing, eh?"

"An excellent suggestion, sir!" I enthused. "I shall indeed."

I returned to the sculptor the next morning with a written agreement for the supply of one bronze statue of Mars and one Etrurian white marble statue of Apollo, to be completed by the *idus* of January. Iktinos thought they'd be ready well before then, perhaps by the Saturnalia in December.

As I entered the forum on my return home, a *praeco* was setting up his portable platform in front of the temple of Castor and Pollux. I waited to hear the announcements he'd make after a large enough gathering had assembled.

A *praeco* is usually an auctioneer who augments his income by doubling as a town-crier, a herald. Twice daily these men shout out the latest news at various stations throughout the city. In recent times they include recitals of the virtues of various artisans and tradesmen. No doubt the heralds are well paid for these commercial inducements, but the populace finds them wearying. The irksome thing is that they're inserted randomly between the important announcements, leaving the listener no alternative but to endure if he wishes to hear a full report on the latest events.

The herald's performance began with some tedious pieces about road repairs and a bad fire in the thirteenth district, the Aventine. Nothing that happens in the Aventine would surprise me—a scurvy neighborhood for the most part, with more than its share of shoddy *insulae* infested by jabbering aliens. Following this, the herald urged upon us the indescribable marvels of Pansa's bakery, located on the Vicus Longinus close by the Via Viminalis, an establishment allegedly renowned throughout the city's fourteen districts for the peerless quality of its bread and pastries.

But his next announcement caught my ear. He declared that the lady Marcia Renata, *virgo vestalis*, was under a physician's care with an infection. I remembered her. The Vestal Marcia Renata had been a guest in the Macro house about six months ago. I recall a handsome, dark-haired woman about average height and perhaps thirty years old. She sat in a place of honor at Macro's table. In recent times women prefer to recline on a couch while dining, like the men. But

many of the older women and the younger ones of conservative manner still use a chair after the old custom. Vestals always sit while dining. I suppose it's a more chaste posture than reclining on one elbow on a *triclinium* couch.

When the herald referred to Marcia Renata, he gave her status in the shrine: teacher of novices and custodian of wills. I suppose this was to let the uninitiated know she's a senior Vestal in her last ten years of service.

At the close of the announcement, the listeners began to disperse, and I turned to make my way home to the Esquiline. Then, on the edge of the crowd I saw the same man Rufinus and I had encountered a few days before at the foot of the Street of the Silversmiths—the one in the toga who'd looked so bloody-minded. But today he was smiling. Had the *praeco* said something that pleased him? And in contrast to the shabby toga he'd worn the other day, now he was clad in a fine linen tunic cinched with a red leather belt and wore good quality sandals.

When he set off at a leisurely pace toward the north-east end of the forum, I followed. I was going in that direction anyway, but I was curious about him. In a minute or so we were going up the gentle rise of the Street of the Silversmiths, I some fifty feet behind, although he'd probably not have noticed me, the street being fairly crowded on such a pleasant day.

Another minute or two and he entered a tavern on the left side of the street, on the ground floor of a decrepit apartment building. Stopping at the door, I hesitated, asked myself, "Why not?" and entered.

Inside I paused to get my bearings; it was dimly lit after the brightness of the street, with only two windows providing illumination. Several tables and rough benches were scattered around, and I saw my red-belted friend seated in a far corner with two other men. His companions looked to be workmen by their dress and ungroomed appearance. I made my way to a small table about ten feet from his, hearing him call to the serving girl for a pitcher of wine. A thin unhappy looking girl, perhaps twelve years old, served them and then approached me.

After her unenthusiastic reply when I queried the wine list, I ordered a cup of a local red I knew to be within the realm of acceptability, but only just so. I knew this was a working man's tavern by its appointments and patrons. No good Picene or Campanian to be found here for those of finicky taste.

Pretending to study the copy of the sculptor's contract as I sipped my wine, I listened to the conversation of 'red belt' and company. This was easily done, for most of their exchange was loud banter and guffaws. I learned that the man I'd followed was 'Gaius Quintus' and observed a certain rough and ready deference to him by the others. Gaius Quintus seemed in an expansive mood for he treated the table, which had been joined by a fourth man, to a second pitcher of wine and bread, cheese, and sausage all around. When one of his group asked Gaius Quintus if he'd addressed the senate lately, they all roared in high glee.

I hadn't intended staying too long, but my curiosity was piqued by this Gaius Quintus fellow. After about an hour I was into my third cup and the place began to fill. It was midday and the local laborers and artisans were ready for lunch. A second girl was now assisting the melancholy child serve tables. Gaius Quintus still presided at his table, his original acquaintances having left and been replaced by others. And he was still ordering pitchers with abandon. The conversational hum in the tavern largely veiled their chatter but I did hear one of them observe that Gaius Quintus was in excellent spirits that day. To that, he replied that he'd heard some interesting news that morning.

Frequent sharing of a jug with Macro over the years has cultivated me into a sensible drinker—well, more or less—so I ordered bread and cheese with my fourth cup of wine. By the

time I'd finished eating, the tavern had thinned to a few patrons. Gaius Quintus had left only minutes before, a trifle unsteadily.

A grizzled, pock-marked man, whom I'd marked earlier as the proprietor, approached as I was finishing the dregs of my wine.

"Mind if I join you, friend?" he asked amiably.

"Not at all, but I was about to leave.

"Before you go, have a cup. Courtesy of the house. I'm Corax, proprietor. I've not seen you in here before, sir."

His 'sir' wasn't obsequious, but it wasn't off-hand, either. I'm sure he'd taken me for a gentleman of some quality because of my accent. Having lived most of my life in wealthy households and possessing a good education, I have what you'd call a 'posh' Roman accent. Also, I dress well. I can't abide shoddy material and poor tailoring.

"Thank you, Corax. I accept. My name is Anthus."

He left to bring me a cup, going into the back room where the kitchen and storeroom would be. While he was gone, I hoped that perhaps, with discretion, I could learn more about the man who'd piqued my interest.

"Here's something more worthy of our palate." Corax grinned, placing a small pitcher and two cups on the table. "Falernian. It's not on my list here, a bit too expensive for my regular patrons, but I keep a small stock for the more discerning, such as you and me, eh, sir?"

Crooning pleasure at his generosity, I toasted his health. Then, after making small talk for several minutes, cursing the never-ending taxes and deplored the hair style, dress, and general deportment of the younger generation, I casually referred to Gaius Quintus.

"The fellow sitting over there earlier, the one with the red belt. He appeared to be enjoying himself, he and his friends," I said idly. "One of your regulars, is he?"

"Oh, you probably mean Gaius Quintus. Yes, he's here most days. Well, of course, he lives here in the *insula*, so it's handy for him. Strange man, in a way."

"Strange? How so?" I hoped to cloak my curiosity as mere polite interest.

"Well, you see, sir," Corax looked over his shoulder to ensure nobody else was listening, "he's one of them patricians that have fallen on hard times, know what I mean? You can tell by his speech and style he's had a privileged background. But with all that, he don't put on fancy airs and such. Well now, you saw him earlier and that's how he usually is."

"Yes, he seemed like one of the gang, as it were."

"Exactly. But you know," Corax leaned toward me confidentially, "his adoptive father was Quintus Haterius, the orator and ex-consul what died a few years back. And his sister is a Vestal Virgin!"

Corax was enjoying his narrative so much that I dutifully expressed wide-eyed awe at his revelation. "But for some reason," Corax continued, "the old man—he was ninety when he died—didn't leave nothing to Gaius Quintus. Don't seem quite right, does it? Know what I mean?"

I showed that I knew what he meant by sighing heavily. "*Ignis aurum probat, miseria fortis viros.*"

Corax shook his head in admiration. "You have a grand way with words, sir. 'Gold is tested by fire, strong men by adversity.' Such a fine phrase should be written down."

Looking suitably modest, I returned to the matter of Gaius Quintus. "And yet, as I said earlier, he seemed carefree today."

"I believe he came into some money the other day," Corax confided. "I'm not sure, but I

think it was an investment of some sort. Like I said before, he lives upstairs here but he's moving out in a few days to better lodgings. So maybe his fortune is looking up."

"May the goddess Fortuna," said I munificently, "clasp him ever to her bosom and favor him with the perpetual radiance of her compassion." Now, I wasn't too happy with that one, with just cause, but Corax seemed to think it a splendid utterance.

I'd been two hours in the tavern, and it was time to leave. I thanked Corax for his hospitality, promised I'd return sometime soon, and departed.

As I walked, my thoughts returned again to the Vestal of the herald's announcement and the night she was a guest in the Macro household. The party had included the emperor's great-nephew, a frequent visitor to the house, Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus. He's better known by his nickname, 'Caligula'—Little Boot—which was given him by the legionaries when he was a toddler in his father's Rhineland army camp. His mother used to dress him in a tiny legionary uniform, including the boot style worn by the soldiers.

I have mixed feelings about Caligula, having encountered him frequently over the years. Macro's taken quite a shine to the boy and regularly invites him to the dinner parties which he and our *domina*, the lady Ennia Naevia, give regularly. I'm sure my master's motive is political rather than altruistic. Caligula is seen as a possible successor to the principate of Rome when his great-uncle Tiberius dies. A happy thought with most of the citizens, who cheer him enthusiastically whenever he appears in public. And of course, his father was the popular hero Germanicus, a grandson of Marcus Antonius. He may have lost the civil war to Augustus, but Antonius is still revered as a hero of the old republic.

Popular as Caligula is with the lower classes, I gather it isn't mutual. The mob cries out such endearments as 'little chick' and 'pet' when his entourage passes along the street but it's only an act on his part when he smiles and waves graciously in return. The boy is a total snob who doesn't care a fig for the masses. They say he won't even tolerate mention of his maternal grandfather, the great Marcus Agrippa who was second in command to Augustus. It embarrasses Caligula that Agrippa was merely of the knightly order and not of patrician blood.

As I said, I learn things when my master's aristocratic chums have partaken generously of the grape. When the wine flows freely, so do their tongues. *In vino veritas*, one might say. Yes, a good phrase. I'll note it for my compilation, my humble gift to future scholars.

Macro's attentions to Caligula are an investment in the future, I'm sure. In the meantime, he winks at the boy's indiscretions in the belief that he'll mature once he assumes the toga of manhood. I say 'boy' because Caligula isn't quite seventeen. That doesn't stop him having an eye for the ladies and making openly suggestive and lewd remarks at the dinner table. The other guests laugh it off, knowing what the future possibly holds for him.

CHAPTER VI

Marcia Renata returned to the *Atrium Vestae* after four days in good spirits and felt well enough to resume her full duties in the shrine. The Chief Vestal was still away so there had been no uncomfortable questions from that dedicated but somewhat humorless lady. Serena's arrangements had worked well. Her self-reproach was waning for she knew now that Vesta had forgiven her. She vowed to serve the goddess faithfully and chastely for the rest of her life. Marcia Renata was happier than she had been for yours.

Her tranquility was shattered on the fifth day.

An *atrium* servant brought her three letters late in the morning. "The messenger who delivered them, my lady, told me there were no replies required." All three letter containers were sealed, but Marcia Renata noted one of them had no signet impressed into the wax. No doubt, she thought, these would be similar to the several letters she'd received the day before—expressions of pleasure that she had recovered from her illness and may she enjoy good health for many years and so forth. As expected, the first two letters were from well-wishers. The third one, the one with no signet, left her ashen with horror.

Marcia Renata from one who knows the truth of your recent illness and who knows of the roles played by Serena Hateria and the physician Kastor. I wish you to perform a certain service for me, one which is within your capability. Such service will guarantee my silence concerning your indiscretion. If you refuse me, you and those involved will be exposed. At the close of the eighth daylight hour tomorrow meet me at the steps of the temple of Saturn. Alone. I will be waiting nearby and will make myself known to you. Our meeting will only require a few minutes. Should you fail to come I will take immediate action.



Seemingly absorbed in reading an inscription on the north side of the temple of Concord, Gaius Quintus glanced casually toward the temple of Saturn, only a hundred feet or so distant. She wasn't there, but it was several minutes before the end of the hour. He resumed his study of the temple wall, then saw two women approaching in the area between the Basilica Julia and the speakers rostra. The tallest wore a filmy head veil and white *pallium*; the other a plain blue knee-length servant's *tunica*.

He watched the women stop at the Golden Milestone. They exchanged a few words, then the servant walked back into the open forum area while her mistress approached the temple of Saturn. When she paused at the bottom of the temple steps, he strode toward her.

"Marcia Renata." He inclined his head courteously. "We have met before but several years ago. I am Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus, adoptive brother of Serena Hateria."

Startled at his identity, she cloaked her reaction with patrician urbanity and stared at him expressionless. Yes, she remembered meeting him, but as he had said, it was long ago. She had been sixteen or seventeen, he a military cadet. He'd visited the *Atrium Vestae* with his adoptive father and Serena had introduced her to them. A handsome, dashing youth then. Was this the same man? The clean-cut boyish features were now sagging in dissipation, his face blotched and creased and the whites of his eyes jaundiced.

"Why do you wish to see me?" she said.

He gestured to the far side of the temple. "Come. We shall walk a little way up the

Capitoline Rise and back again. By then you will know exactly what I wish you to do."



Marcia Renata gazed vacantly at the *capsa* on the small table in her bed chamber. It contained the will of Serena Hateria, her dearest friend, her sister in the service of the goddess. An hour earlier, just after midnight, she had removed it from the will depository, putting an empty letter container in its place so its absence wouldn't be noticed.

"Forgive me, Serena," she whispered. "It is for your sake as well as my own." The linen wick of her lamp had burned low, but she didn't notice. She heard the voice of Gaius Quintus telling her to send him his adoptive sister's will the next morning. He would return it in three days. If she failed, he would betray her impiety and she would die at the Colline gate. And, he'd added, Serena Hateria would most certainly die also, as an accomplice to the sacrilege, as would the physician. Nor would Marcia's parents escape. Informers were readily available to implicate her family. Surely she knew this. Or had her sheltered life in the House of the Vestals protected her from the realities of life?

"How could such charges against me be proven?" she'd asked.

"The person who procured the physician will testify," he'd replied. "As will, I am quite certain, two of the attendants in the physician's residence. They are slaves."

His implication was quite clear: slaves would be interrogated under judicial torture and rarely did the rack and the pincers fail the prosecutor.

Long after the guttering lamp had expired, she sat in the dark, drugged with misery.



As Gaius Quintus had instructed, the parcel was delivered to Corax, tavern proprietor in the Street of the Silversmiths the next morning. Just before noon Gaius Quintus arrived, thanked Corax and gave him two *denarii* for his trouble, ordered a round of drinks for the half dozen patrons and departed with his parcel.

In his new lodgings on the second floor of a small *insula* in the ninth district just off the Flaminian Way, he studied the parcel. Wrapped securely in waxed parchment, it was sealed in several places without signet. Carefully he removed the parchment. It would be used again to wrap the *capsa* when returned to Marcia Renata. Then he removed the two *capsa* seals with painstaking care, keeping them intact. They bore the imprint of Serena Hateria's personal signet.

The will was a nine-page document drawn in Latin in conformity with the law which didn't recognize a will prepared in a foreign language. Appended to it were three codicils which comprised another six pages. The last page had the signatures and seals of seven witnesses, one of them that of the *virgo vestalis maxima*; the others were the names of males, all patrician by their clan and family names. It was dated three years ago, in the consulships of Cnaeus Cornelius Lentulus Gaetulicus and Gaius Calvisius Sabinus.

Gaetulicus? he asked himself. I know that name. Yes, he's now a proconsul somewhere in Gaul or wherever. He was a friend of my late adoptive father, damn his ashes, and his youngest son was recently elected *quaestor*. I remember the consul Gaetulicus attending old Haterius's funeral rites three years ago. Yes, this will was drawn up shortly after that, no doubt replacing an earlier one that had named Serena's father as beneficiary.

He began reading the will's stilted, clerkish language; it was obviously drawn up by a

professional *advocatus*. It began with instructions for his adoptive sister's funeral arrangements and obsequies, entrusting their care to one Marcus Titus Fronto. Fronto? Another familiar name. Of course, the banker in the Basilica Aemilia who'd dispensed the wretched ten thousand *sesterces* to him a few days back.

The will next specified the sacrifice of a white ox to Jupiter and another to Saturn, also two unblemished white lambs each to Vesta and Minerva. The sacrifices were to be offered at the respective temple altars the day prior to the funeral, expenses to be paid for from her estate.

At the sixth page he raised his eyebrows and grunted in surprise. The miserable bitch had included him in the will! His second grunt was one of disdain. She'd specified one hundred and twenty-five thousand *denarii*, only a half million *sesterces*.

His irritation mounted as he read further, the will naming several bequests of a million *sesterces* or more to various individuals and organizations—the ones he knew by reputation had no need of her money at all! Also, she decreed the freeing of one hundred slaves, the maximum permissible by law, from her country estates. *Latifundia* laborers, indeed! And each to be given ten thousand *sesterces* and have the five percent manumission tax paid by the estate. As well, each of the *Atrium Vestae* servants, including the slaves, were to receive handsome sums.

After the many bequests and expenses had been met, the balance of her estate was left to the imperial privy purse, the *fisc*. Gaius Quintus seethed. The balance consisted of whatever liquid assets remained after the bequests plus all of her property as listed in a codicil. The listing, which cited estimated annual income from crop yields, vintage, livestock, and rentals, gave the legal description of five large estates in Campania and Etruria and seven *insulae* in the city. Apart from the annual income, the sale value of her holdings was estimated at almost one hundred and eighty million *sesterces*!

The two other codicils listed the freedmen and women of the Haterius clan who were to be given bequests and the names of the slaves to be manumitted.

He studied the sixth page. The item concerning him consisted of three lines about one-third down from the top. It read, 'To my adoptive brother Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus, son of Marcus Domitius Florus, adoptive son of Quintus Haterius, I give and bequeath one hundred and twenty-five thousand silver *denarii*.' The last of the three lines ran only half-way across the page. There was room enough for the item to be altered slightly without needing to add an extra line. Good. This would prove easier than he'd thought. If she hadn't included him in the will, he'd have had to insert an item in the appropriate bequest section. That would have necessitated the rewriting of several pages, but leaving the last intact so as not to disturb the signatures and seals of the witnesses.

He mustn't be greedy about the size of his bequest. Too large a sum would probably invite attention. He doubted that the witnesses would remember the details of something they'd signed three years ago, and some of them probably hadn't bothered read it, for that matter. But discretion was in order. No, what he wanted was something that would leave him comfortable, yet small enough that those who knew of Serena's disaffection for him could agree that his bequest was really nothing more than a token.

He totaled up her cash bequests and found them in the order of nineteen million *sesterces*. Add to that the value of her properties and the estate was approximately two hundred million! The bequests, other than that to the *fisc*, ranged from smaller sums for the freedmen and women and servants up to two gifts of six million *sesterces* each. Dare he go higher? Six million? If he spent, say, five gold pieces a day, five hundred *sesterces*, that would last him something like thirty-two or three years. Nor did that take into account what he would earn on interest and

investments.

A nice sum, six million. But was he pressing his luck? Would a witness recall there had been only two gifts of that amount in the will? Probably not, but what if...?

Five million? He worked out how far that would stretch. Twenty-seven years, assuming the rate of five hundred a day. That would last him into his sixties. And there was no reason he couldn't enhance such a modest fortune by prudent management. He'd learned the hard way in recent years about rash judgment in money matters. He could prove that Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus was a shrewd man of affairs, once given the chance. What a pity the sow Serena wouldn't be here to see it.

Very well, five million it would be. That represented less than three percent of Serena's estate, hardly an amount to provoke interest in those curious enough to learn how Serena's wealth had been distributed. All in all, he was being quite reasonable about the matter.

The third line of his bequest would be changed to read: 'one million two hundred and fifty thousand silver *denarii*' in place of 'one hundred and twenty-five thousand.'

He would call upon the Sicilian early in the morning. It was too late to go now, with evening approaching. Only a fool would enter the Subura district after dusk without a substantial bodyguard.

He knew the Sicilian's fee would be high, but it would be well worth it. Gaius Quintus had used his skilled service once before. He knew that the sixth page of Serena's will would be replaced by one which matched perfectly the parchment color and texture and script of the original.

With one small exception, of course.



Marcia Renata opened the small package just delivered by public messenger. Gaius Quintus had said the will would be returned to her in three days. It was three days, almost to the hour, since she'd had it sent to him.

The *capsa* was intact, the seals with Serena Hateria's signet impression unbroken. But she knew that the container had been opened. That night, after returning Serena's will to the depository, she entered the shrine and sacrificed a cake of salted flour on the altar of Vesta. The young novice who was tending the altar fire that night observed Marcia Renata stand in silent prayer for several minutes after making sacrifice.

She's offering thanks to the goddess, the *virguncula* priestess thought, for recovery from her illness.

CHAPTER VII

Today is the *calendae*, the first day of the ill-favored month of August, a month I can well do without and I'm sure the household stewards of every wealthy family would agree with me.

Let the bucolic poets sing of the sixth month with its glorious golden days and balmy nights, its harvesting of the crops and maturing of the vine. For me it's something else. It's party time in the city.

After the religious torpor of July--the only event of note being the Games of Apollo which lost its religious character ages ago--August more than makes up for it. Now don't misjudge me. I'm as pious as the next man and know that the gods must be honored. No, it's not their divine rites that disquiet me; it's the carousing by all social classes that invariably follows.

The highly popular festivals of Hercules, Diana and Consus all occur in August, each with their revels. And when the aristocrats make merry that means lavish dinner parties, which in turn means long hours of demanding labor for several days in addition to the household servants' regular duties.

Macro and his lady are hosting two such gathering in the next few weeks, one for the festival of Diana and the other in honor of Consus. Diana's anniversary date is the *idus* of August, the thirteenth, but the Macro party will be held two days later. The cult of Diana is one of the few open to slaves and by custom all slaves are given a holiday on her day. That, of course, would leave the household rather short-handed for party preparations. Have you any idea how long it takes to prepare and cook eighty or ninety dormice baked in honey and poppy seed? And the dormice would be only one of the ten or twelve side dishes to go with the main courses.

The Consualia, the festival of Consus, falls on the twenty-first. Although only a minor deity, Consus is Rome's ancient god of the granary, but he's also the god of horse-racing. According to legend, when Rome's great founder, Romulus, and his followers stole and raped the Sabine women, the Sabine men were too occupied watching horse races in honor of Consus to be aware of their ladies' fate.

Having had their way with the Sabine women, Romulus and his friends agreed, reasonably enough, that Consus had obviously approved their action, having paved the way for them, as it were. So horse-racing was placed under his protection.

Later on, Romulus himself was deified as the god Quirinus; that's why we Romans are called the 'Quirites.' Killing his brother Remus and indulging himself with the Sabine women didn't seem to hamper his social and religious progress. The ways of the gods are mysterious, are they not?

Appropriately, the shrine of Consus is located only a few feet away from the horses' thundering hooves under the *spina* of the Circus Maximus. On his day a splendid spectacle is given for the god. There are rites performed by the *flamen* of Quirinus, his priests and the Vestal Virgins; music, parades, horse races, everything. And just as slaves enjoy a holiday courtesy of Diana, work horses and mules are rested on the granary god's day.

I'll be overseeing the preparations for two parties only four days apart. *Ab ovo usque ad mala*. Yes, that expresses it quite well—from the egg to the apples, another excellent phrase spontaneously uttered by myself. I sometimes wonder if my talent is wasted as an accountant, scribe, and major-domo to a prefect of Rome, peerless as I am at such occupations. Our *domina*, Ennia Naevia, is a stickler for the custom of starting her dinners with eggs and, many hours later, ending with apples and seasonal fruit. But it's what comes between that creates the work.

Our lady has discussed the menus, which vary slightly for each dinner. Essentially each one consists of main courses of venison, veal, stuffed shoulder of boar, suckling pig, lobster, red snapper, crane, chicken, and ostrich. The side dishes, other than a large assortment of vegetables, include the aforementioned dormice, milk-fed snails, thrush, turtledove, stuffed hare, grilled sow's womb, Ostian meatballs, cuttle fish, eels in plum sauce, calf's brain and Lucanian sausage. There will also be an assortment of hot and cold sauces, honeyed cheese, custards, and pastries. Enough to feed thirty on each occasion.

I won't bother mentioning the sumptuary law to my master. The divine Augustus, who they say was austere in his dining habits, decreed about fifty years ago that Romans were forbidden certain foods. He considered that the upper classes were becoming too dissolute through their pursuit of the luxurious life with its exotic foods and dress. So, he proscribed several foods and styles of dress. One of the items so forbidden was dormice, by the way. Lip service was given to his decree but little else. Our present *princeps*, Tiberius Caesar, recently restated the sumptuary law. Coming from such a known sybarite as himself, little heed is paid, if any.

I must speak to Macro about the wine. I've already decided what will be served but I permit him to believe that the selection is his. May the gods forbid such an event.

During the next few days, I shall call upon various trades people: our wine merchant, Crispus; Horio, the greengrocer, the caterer, Acastus; and the impudent Greek freedman who presides over the flute players guild. There'll be no trouble with Crispus and Horio; I've dealt with them for years and after a few early contests, we now understand each other perfectly.

As for the wretched flute man, he knows well enough who my master is but even so I'll inform him that the guests of Macro will include such people as the Praetorian Prefect and Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus of the imperial family, both renowned for their appreciation of good music. Accordingly, the three *tibicenes* and the *citharista* to be supplied will possess the utmost artistry of their instruments. I'm not too sure that three flutes and a lute are necessary. Nobody will hear them over the noise anyway, but that's what my lady wants.

Which reminds me, I must also arrange for the entertainers. Jugglers and acrobats to perform during the meal and dancers later. But not a *pronuntiato*. Neither Macro or his lady enjoy a stentorian recitation of the glory and adventures of legendary heroes upon such occasions.

I'll require eleven extra staff for each party—two cooks, three kitchen help and six *triclinium* attendants. I have seventeen servants under me, but it would be a disaster to utilize such people as Macro's valet, my lady's hairdresser, the gardener and the night watchman as kitchen or dining room staff. Hiring extra staff for two events will cost fifty *denarii*. Acastus will ask much more than that, as is his custom, but he'll get fifty.

Macro and lady are dining on the festival of Hercules at the house of the consul Lucius Rubellius Geminus. On that day I hope to attend the sacrifice at the temple of Hercules where a heifer will be offered to the god by a senior magistrate on behalf of the people of Rome. After the sacrifice a feast, including the roast heifer, will be set up outside the temple for the crowd.

I can't take my Petronia with me. Women are prohibited from attending rites for Hercules. And rightly so! Hercules, it is said, was once refused a drink of water by women. Slaves and dogs are also forbidden. Guards will be posted to kill any dog chancing to wander too close to the temple.

The temple of Hercules is a small, round, colonnaded edifice, very ancient, located near the starting-gate end of the Circus Maximus. Three years ago, I was inside it and stood before the statue of the god, clad in his lion skin and bearing an immense club. I poured a libation on his altar and had a good chat with the cheerful *aedituus* on duty that day.

I was Anthus the slave then and had the temple custodian known that, he'd never have allowed me inside the god's precinct. My decent tunic and sandals and treacly accent probably eased my way. But now I am Quintus Sutorius Anthus, freedman, and I shall observe the temple rites clad in the toga *virilis* of a citizen.

The heifer will be sacrificed to Hercules on the twelfth of August, unless the omens are inauspicious. That's most unlikely. Before his deification, Hercules was the mortal son of Jupiter Best and Greatest.

Why would the gods wish to deprive such a one of his day of honor?

CHAPTER VIII

"I've been away from the city for several weeks and only returned yesterday," he said. "I learned this morning of your illness and hastened to pay my respects."

"You are kind," Marcia Renata said. "I am much better now." That we should meet sooner or later was inevitable, she thought, but I'd hoped it wouldn't be for some time.

He gazed at her in admiration, from her sandaled feet to her long dark hair. "You know, this is the first time I've seen you without your ceremonial headdress. I must say you're even more attractive without it. And you are a very beautiful woman, you know. Ah! You're blushing! Come now, Marcia, surely a Vestal can be paid a compliment just as any other woman. Just because you're a priestess doesn't mean that you have to be a drab, pasty-faced crone. Oh, I dare say your shrine has had its share of withered hags down the centuries, but I reckon your goddess is happier with someone like you tending her altar."

"You must not talk like that!" she protested. "If Vesta does indeed take notice of her attendants, I'm sure that she looks into our hearts and minds, not at our features."

"An appropriate sentiment for a priestess, of course. One could hardly expect a Vestal to extol the physical virtues. Or..." he leered, "...the physical pleasures. . . ."

She arose quickly. "It's warm in here. We'll go to the courtyard where it'll be cooler and more private." She walked to the door of the reception room, and he followed. The courtyard was bright with the early afternoon sun, and they sat on a bench in the shade of the portico. Two female slaves who were cleaning the goldfish pond fountain bowed to Marcia Renata, picked up their cleaning materials and departed.

"You appeared disconcerted when I mentioned physical pleasures," he said. "But you and I have, shall we say, enjoyed one another's company in recent times. Surely we have no need of reticence."

She sat staring into the distance without expression.

"When I heard of your illness I came at once, as I've told you. But it was my intention to call upon you within the next few days, even so. On the eve of the festival of Hercules, my family is having a dinner party and I wish you to be my guest."

Marcia Renata remained silent, still not looking at him, but he seemed not to notice.

"And after the dinner, we can go to my chambers and enjoy some good wine. And then..."

"No," she said, turning toward him.

"No?" His face darkened. "Why not?"

"I couldn't attend, even if I wished to accept your invitation. For the four days which end on the *idus*, I shall be the *sacricola* priestess, offering the daily sacrifice and libations to Vesta and tending her fire. I cannot leave the *atrium* during that time. No," she repeated. "And I will tell you why. I wasn't going to, but now I feel that I must. Listen to what I have to say."

Sensing the gravity of the occasion from her expression and voice, he nodded silently.

"I was pregnant, and I had an abortion," she said evenly. "That was my 'illness.' It was a fairly easy experience for me because I was only five weeks pregnant, and I had an excellent physician. No, please don't interrupt. Let me tell you everything and then we'll talk."

She looked at his pallid, pimply face with its deep-set eyes below a broad forehead, his thin hair already receding despite his youth.

"It happened on the night of the flute players banquet," she said meaningfully. "Yes, it was you. You're the only man I've ever been with. Afterward I was in torment over my impiety...my

broken vow of chastity. When I realized a few weeks later that I was pregnant, I came close to madness. I readied myself to commit suicide, trying to think of a way to make it appear accidental to prevent my family from suffering shame. And then Serena Hateria, my dearest friend, saved me. She..."

Marcia Renata's voice caught and her eyes moistened. Then she continued.

"Serena sensed I was deeply troubled and talked to me, wanting to comfort me. I was so desperate, so utterly miserable that I told her of my condition. Instead of abandoning me, she took charge of the situation, arranged for an abortion and, in her acting capacity of Chief Vestal, announced that I was being treated for inflammation."

She looked at him steadily. "Is that what you heard? That I had an inflammation of the liver?" Before he could answer, she continued.

"During the time I was in the physician's residence, I could think of nothing but my betrayal of the goddess, wondering why she hadn't punished me or shown a sign of displeasure. I then realized there would be one reason only. She had forgiven me my sin. Why she did so is not for me to know. We do not question the ways of the deities. But by her compassion and forgiveness I was bound to her for life, and I vowed I would remain in her service until I died, that never again would I compromise myself in any manner. So now you know why I cannot go with you."

From his wooden expression she assumed his self-assured urbanity had been shaken, that he'd respond with some stumbling expression of regret and apology.

Instead, with an edge to his voice, he said, "And just how many others know of this beside your friend Serena and the physician?"

"None. They are the only ones." I can't tell him of Serena's adoptive brother, she thought, or he'll believe there are others as well. And I've already paid dearly for the brother's silence.

"Did you tell them my name?"

Shocked at his question, she cried, "Never! I'd not do such a thing! Serena did ask me, but I refused to tell her. She didn't appear interested in any case. She was more concerned about me. As for the physician, he asked nothing. In fact, he never once referred to my condition and maintained the fiction between us that he was treating a liver ailment. No, I swear by Vesta and the *lares* of my family that not a person knows, other than you and I."

He considered this a moment, stony-faced, then smiled. "Well, you've had a trying time, it seems. Yes. But now it's all over. All's well that ends well. And I shall indeed respect your renewed vow to the goddess. Should you decide to accept my invitation for the eve of Hercules' festival, I shall conduct myself with the utmost decorum. No...you said that you're serving the altar of Vesta at that time. Well, some other time, perhaps."

Arising, he inclined his head to her. "I will leave now. We'll meet again, Marcia Renata, so until then, gracious lady, farewell." He began to depart, then turned back to her. "Ah, I forgot to ask you. Who is the physician that attended you?"

At her look of uncertainty, he beamed reassuringly. "I feel obliged to express my appreciation of the service he rendered you. Anonymously, of course. A gift of money. He'll not know the source. And it would ease my conscience to make such a gesture."

What harm can there be in that? she thought. And I suppose it's his way of showing regret. The physician is certainly worth of such a gift. Yes, I'll tell him.

"His name is Kastor," she said. "His residence is on the Vicus Patricius, just past the Clivus Suburanna."



The lady Cornelia, *virgo vestalis maxima*, was extremely agitated. She had just returned from the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus where she'd assembled with several other religious and civic dignitaries at the urgent request of the *flamen Dialis*. The high priest of Jupiter had summoned them to declare that tomorrow's rites in honor of Hercules would not be observed. An augury performed that morning, barely two hours earlier, had been inauspicious. An omen of profanation of the shrine of Vesta had been interpreted by an augur from *impetrativa* observed by a magistrate on the *auguraculum* of Rome.

Ah, yes! thought the Chief Vestal, and who was that augur? Who else but that pompous old fool Plautius Caesennius Pastor. She'd known him for forty years and more, an arrogant ass whose family wealth had eased his progress. She recalled her father and his having quarreled over some political matter many years ago, early in the principate of Augustus. Was he so petty as to continue the quarrel by creating concern over the shrine of Vesta merely because she was the chief priestess? Yes, she thought, he was indeed. To think that she, a Cornelian of the *gens* of Scipio Africanus and Sulla, a patrician born and bred, should be nagged by that pretentious plebian wretch. Augury, indeed!

For in fact, although she was head of one of Rome's most revered bodies of the pontifical college of priests, the lady Cornelia had serious doubts over the practice of divination in any of its forms. It was all too arcane, too occult to stand up under reasonable examination. Why would the gods with their authority over mortal destiny resort to expressing their divine will through lightening bolts, the entrails of animals, and the behavior of birds?

However, in her position, the Chief Vestal had to pay lip service to divination. Well, I'm in good company, she thought. The *pontifex maximus* himself, Tiberius Caesar, has made it fairly plain he places little faith in how many times an owl hoots or whether there are spots or not on the liver of a ram. A pity, though, that Caesar should be so obsessed with astrology. That fool Arab fortune-teller he keeps with him on Capreae probably makes more decisions than the Senate.

Accordingly, the Chief Vestal acknowledged the augury and advised the *flamen* and the others that rites of purification would be performed, and prayers made in the shrine. But she wondered what the high priest himself thought about all this. Although she'd known him many years, she didn't really understand him. A strange man. But then, who wouldn't be slightly odd living the restricted life he did? Never mind the absurd, uncomfortable garb that he and his wife, the *flaminica*, had to wear. The severe religious prohibitions forced on him were beyond reason, their origins shrouded in antiquity. The high priest couldn't ride a horse, eat beans, look upon an army, touch a goat, have his hair cut by a slave or freedman, see fetters, observe anyone at manual labor, spend more than one night away from the city, and on and on. Utter nonsense!

So it was that the Chief Vestal called together her priestesses and told them of the augury. "But omens are not infallible," she cautioned them. "A sign of something to come is no guarantee that it will come. Augurs can be mistaken in their interpretations and often have been. So, there may be a profanation of our shrine or there may not be. But the shrine is the symbolic hearth of the city and any desecration it suffers is a threat to the people of Rome. Therefore, we shall sacrifice to Vesta, Mother Goddess of Rome and pray to her for the welfare of her people, the Romans, the Quirites."

She looked at Marcia Renata. "The *sacricola* will offer salted oat cakes and pour libations of wine and oil on the altar at the close of the twelfth daylight hour." To the two *virgunculae* she said, "The novices will sweep the floor of the shrine and sprinkle it with water freshly drawn

from the sacred spring of Egeria."

"My lady, what announcement will be made to the people on this matter?" Serena Hateria asked.

"It was decided by the *flamen* and the magistrates that the people shall be told the rites of Hercules have been postponed until an omen is auspicious, with no mention of the shrine of Vesta being involved. We don't want public alarm being aroused. The heralds will make the announcement today and tomorrow. I shall convene the *atrium* servants and make the same statement to them. See that you all conduct yourselves accordingly. Go now to your duties."



She had offered the sacrifice and poured the libations and now, in the first night hour, Marcia Renata sat quietly with Serena Hateria in the courtyard as was their custom most evenings.

"If a profanation should occur, it's my fault, all my doing, Serena. I truly believed Vesta had forgiven me and I renewed my vow of service to her for the remainder of my years. I know differently now. When I performed the rites earlier, I had a premonition of disaster approaching and I felt the goddess was watching in silent contempt while I attended her altar."

"We've talked of this before, Marcia," Serena said. "I thought you'd come to see things in a reasonable light. This augury business has upset you, but you mustn't let it. It has absolutely nothing to do with your recent situation, nothing! And, as for augurs, I agree entirely with Cornelia. They're wrong as often as right. Just who are augurs anyway? Men who are appointed to the college. And we both know that 'appointed' in bald fact means they purchased their position."

Marcia was close to tears. "But the omen was directed to our shrine. It must have been my offense. What else could it be? I'm no longer worthy to serve the goddess. I dread having to enter into her shrine tonight to attend the fire."

"You needn't dread it because tonight I shall perform your duties and again tomorrow if need be. You can take my place in a few days. By that time, you'll realize this is no more than an emotional reaction to the stress of recent days. Tonight, you will sleep. Perhaps you'll dream of ten days from now when two hundred thousand voices roar, 'Hail Marcia! Hail Serena' as we walk in the procession of the rites of Consus in the Circus Maximus. That, my dearest Marcia, will be the reality."

She stood and held out her hand. "Come now, I'll see you to your chambers where you'll have a warm cup of wine and then go to bed."

CHAPTER IX

The night *janitrix* awoke in panic at the heavy clunk of the knocker. She'd been dozing in her chair just inside the main entrance to the *atrium Vestae*. If the Chief Vestal finds out, I'll be whipped! the terrified girl thought. Seizing her keyring she unlocked the large door which opened onto the high-walled *vestibulum*, the forecourt fronting the entrance, and ran to the bronze barred gateway in the wall.

An army officer stood at the gate. At least she thought he was an officer by the cape and plumed helmet she could discern in the faint starlit night.

"You took long enough!" he snapped. "Unlock the gate. Then awaken the Chief Vestal! I have an urgent message for her. Quickly now!"

The trembling girl opened the gate, relocking it after he had entered. Lady Cornelia will be most displeased at my wakening her, she despaired. It's well into the seventh night hour. And the officer might complain to her that I was slow in answering his knock.

"Please follow me, sir." She bowed. Halfway across the vestibulum a hand clamped roughly across her nose and mouth as her breast exploded in searing agony. She heard the metallic clink of her key-ring falling onto a flagstone.

Supporting her sagging body with his left arm, he withdrew the long blade from her upper back, casually wiping it clean on her tunic before inserting it into the sheath at his waist. He dragged the body to a corner of the yard, laying it against the bottom of the wall. Then he picked up the key-ring and entered the *atrium*. The *janitrix* had left the door ajar but now he locked it. There were five keys on the ring and the second one he tried fit the lock.

The entrance hall was about thirty feet wide and fifty deep, sparsely illuminated by a half dozen small lamps. But he'd been here before and knew the basic design of the House, at least this part of it. One of the doors at the far end led to the reception chamber, the other to the open peristyle in the center of the House, with its ponds, fountains, and statues. The door to the right gave entry to the servants' quarters, storerooms, and kitchen. To his left at the far end was the entrance to the Vestals' private chambers and dining area.

There was another door to his left, not twenty feet from where he stood. He knew it was the entrance to the covered passageway which led into the shrine of Vesta adjacent to the House of the Vestals. He approached it stealthily, finding it unlocked. Did that mean the *sacricola* priestess was in the shrine? Or was it kept unlocked because of the continual comings and goings of the Vestals?

Cautiously he opened the door and entered the passageway, closing the door behind him. He saw, about ten feet ahead, an entrance into the shrine, dimly outlined by a flickering light from within. He crept toward it and positioned himself to one side while he looked into the shrine. Eyes now adapted to the gloom, he saw that nobody was there. The light came from the sacred fire of Vesta burning on the altar, in a brazier holding a large bowl from which the flames rose and fell lazily. The fire was low, but he knew that the vestals checked it regularly. All he had to do was wait and she'd appear very soon.

The circular shrine was about thirty feet across. On the opposite side from him and a little to the right was a large double door. He knew it was the main entrance, opening onto a wide stone staircase which faced the Sacred Way.

The altar stood in the center of the shrine, its six-foot length running parallel to the double doors. Drawing close to it he saw that the fire's brazier was set into a shallow pit in the stone top.

The front of the altar was bare of ornamentation other than what looked like sheaves of grain sculpted in low relief in each corner. He presumed this was the altar front because it faced the entrance. At its base was a low pedestal, a foot deep and a few inches high, which didn't extend around the rest of the altar.

He'd only been in the shrine a minute or so, but she could come at any time now. He must hide. There, on either side of the double doors was a life-sized statue, each set into a spacious niche. Quickly he walked over to them. One was Minerva, goddess of almost everything you could think of; the other was Apollo, a likewise ubiquitous god.

There looked to be room for him behind either one, but Minerva's hands were spread in a benevolent posture such that it would prove awkward to maneuver himself behind her. Apollo gave no such hindrance and he found adequate space between the statue's marble back and the niche wall. Removing his helmet, he set it on the floor, tipped on its side so that the plume and burnished metal faced toward the rear of the niche,

He waited. Patiently at first, then with growing irritation as the minutes went by. Where *is* the woman? he brooded. Then his heart raced at the sound of voices, faint at first but becoming louder. Instinctively he reached inside his cloak and fingered the dagger. Male voices—several of them, laughing, chatting casually. He heard one man address another as 'decurion' and relaxed. It was a detachment of the Night Watch, the *vigiles* on fire patrol in the forum area, passing by the shrine's main entrance. Their voices faded.

He didn't hear the door open but suddenly the passageway was bathed in a soft glow from the lamps of the hall beyond. She was here! He drew his cloak up to cover the bottom half of his face and watched as she entered the shrine and walked to the altar.

Stepping onto the low pedestal, she inspected the fire, then went to the back of the altar, bending low, her face obscured. She returned to the front, carrying a small urn and a basket. Placing the basket on the altar top, she carefully decanted a measure of liquid from the urn into the fire bowl.

He was only a few feet behind her as she placed the urn on the altar and reached for the basket. He thrust the blade to its hilt into her upper back, braced the back of her neck with his left hand and yanked the dagger free. She started to drop as his second thrust sank deeply into her ribs below her right armpit. He jerked the blade free as she fell to the altar base, half sprawled on her left side.

The deed done, he looked down on her with insouciance as she slowly turned her head to look up at his face, which was illuminated by the altar fire.

"You...you!"

"Yes, lady," he replied. "Me." He stepped back to avoid the spreading puddle of blood. Her face was shrouded by the dark shadow at the altar base, but he could faintly discern her features warped in agony.

"Farewell, lady." He dropped the dagger to the floor beside her and walked to the statue of Apollo where he retrieved his helmet and put it on. "I thank you for your service, Apollo, son of Jupiter. I will offer you a white ox on your next feast day."

After ensuring that nobody was in the hall, he locked the entrance behind him after he'd left the building. The night was darker now, an overcast obliterating the stars. Crossing the *vestibulum*, he re-locked the gate when he was outside and flung the keyring over the wall in the direction of the *janitrix*'s body. Then he walked into the night.



She knew he'd left the shrine. The excruciating agony had ebbed, turning to a duller pain that pulsed through her in slow waves. She gurgled on the frothy blood drooling from her mouth.

Turning her head to face the altar, she slowly, painfully brought her left index finger to her mouth and, reaching out with the bloodied trembling finger, inscribed a shaky 'G' on the white stone of the altar front. A few minutes later she had added 'A' and 'I.'

Her lifeless finger dropped to the pedestal as she began the downstroke of a 'U.'

Serena Hateria's eyes stared sightlessly at the altar of her goddess while above her, the domed ceiling of the shrine glimmered palely from the sacred fire of Vesta.

CHAPTER X

I stand before the statue of Apollo, transfixed, mesmerized by the white marble face, the eyes burning into mine, locking me in his gaze. Why am I here? And where am I? I don't remember coming here but I'm vaguely aware of being in a large room, dimly lit by a taper of some kind which must be behind me. The body of the god has a velvety, moon-silver sheen, faintly luminescent in the wavering light. Still his eyes penetrate, looking through mine and into my mind. I'm apprehensive but not afraid. Did he send for me? Yes, I sense that he did. I know he wants to tell me something, but why should a god be tongue-tied in the presence of a mortal? Is he waiting for me to show reverence? I'll touch his chin in respect. There. Oh, his sorrow and despair are indescribable. The torment floods from him into my mind through my touching fingers! But what must I do, Apollo *Medice*, Apollo *Paeon*? I know somehow that you are here in your guise as Doctor, Healer. How can I help you? Is that why you sent for me? The god has heard! His right arm is rising, slowly, slowly, pointing now to some place behind me, telling me to look there. I turn...

"Wake up, Anthus! Wake up!" Petronia was shaking my shoulders violently. "Wake up! Bad dream you have."

"I'm awake," I croaked. In the dark I heard her leave the bed and open the door to our chambers. A moment later she returned, carrying the lamp that burns all night in the hall outside our quarters. Putting it on the small table beside the bed, she propped herself on one elbow beside me, looking at me with concern.

"Bad dream you have, no?" My Petronia's rather indifferent Latin becomes even shakier when she's excited or under stress.

"I had a bad dream, yes," I said, caressing the tumbling black hair that framed her small, pale face. "But not really a *bad* dream, my thrush. Disturbing but not frightening."

"So, this dream tell me," she ordered. Petronia has a fascination with dreams and enjoys interpreting them. Something she inherited from her Slavic ancestors? I believe that the Slavs are fairly deep into such matters—fortune-telling, curses and so forth.

She listened attentively as I related my dream to her, then laid back on her pillow, eyes closed. A minute or so went by, then she rose to her elbow again.

"This statue not frighten you but seem friendly, hey?"

"Well, 'friendly' isn't quite the word, but no, he wasn't threatening me in any way. More like he was trying to tell me something, maybe warning me of something."

"And you feeling very, very sad. He make you like him, sad. Poor statue want you to know unhappy he was."

"Yes." But why me?"

"Why not?" She shrugged with Slavic indifference. "When statue pointed at something for you to look, you didn't look."

"Well, no," I said. "You woke me before I could turn around."

She reflected on this briefly. "No, not me to blame. Yes, I wake you because you talk loud and sweat like hog. But if you meant to look what statue pointed then you would see. Dream ended there, all over. Not meant for you to know even if you not wake up. You sleep now. Good night." She laid down and shut her eyes.

"But aren't you going to tell me what the dream meant?"

"Morning. I tell you then after I think more. Goodnight."

But I can't sleep. It's growing close to first light, and I've lain here for hours, ever since Petronia shook me awake. I'll try to get some rest during the day. The rites of Hercules have been deferred, so I'll not be attending his temple after all. Petronia is snoring softly. Why can't I sleep? Because I still feel the utter despair that emanated from the image of Apollo? Did I fail you by not seeing? Or was it meant to be, as Petronia believes?

I'm exhausted. But I can't sleep.

CHAPTER XI

The heated wine hadn't helped her to sleep. In the soft light of her night lamp Marcia looked at the small wine pitcher on her bed table. Perhaps if I take some more...no, it's long since turned cold and probably a little sour. What time is it now? The ninth or tenth hour at least.

I've been awake ever since Serena left me. How can I ever sleep again, tormented by guilt? My sin is the greatest a Vestal can commit and there will be no forgiveness. I have brought divine anger against the people of Rome. There will be a profanation of the shrine, no matter the 'wait and see' attitude of the Chief Vestal and Serena. I know it will happen because I am its cause.

Serena has been kind and loving to me ever since we were novices, two uncertain little girls taken from our families. Oh, we were mindful of the honor of being chosen to serve the shrine, but honor was a misty concept in our childish minds. Serena was always the stronger. Without her friendship and love I doubt I'd have survived the early years of ritual and restriction. And how have I repaid her? With betrayal. Oh, Serena, forgive me.

The memory of Serena slapping her face shattered her bitter self-flagellation. Then, the stinging blow had broken her rising panic. Now, the memory of it prevented her sinking deeper into the pit. She saw the torchlight reflected in the rippling surface of the goldfish pond and heard Serena's voice. 'Hysterics are beneath the dignity of a priestess and a patrician.'

I need you to slap me again, Serena. My mind churns and twists. I can't control my... No! No, Serena! I don't need you to bring me to my senses again. All my life I've relied on you and given little in return. Even now you're carrying out my duties while I wallow in self-pity. You reminded me that I'm a priestess and a patrician. And so I shall be. I will find my own strength.

I've heard Serena leaving and returning to her chambers during the night, attending to the shrine. But not for the last few hours. Perhaps she's occupied with something else. A sick servant? Or sitting in the courtyard. Wherever she is, I'll go to her at once.

Marcia left her bed and trimmed the lamp that had burned all night in her bed chamber, then washed her face at the small stand on which rested a large bowl, pitcher, towels, a bronze mirror, and her grooming aids. Removing her nightdress, she put on a fresh white *stola* and sandals.

When she quietly opened the door to Serena's chambers, the night lamp had burned low, but it was light enough to see she wasn't in bed. She carried the lamp to the adjacent sitting room, but Serena wasn't there, either. She's in the shrine, Marcia thought, or the courtyard.

As she passed through the door connecting the Vestals' quarters with the entrance hall, Marcia encountered the night watch servant. The woman inclined her head. "I'm going to see if the lady Serena Hateria is in her chambers, lady. It's time to call her for her altar duties."

"She's not there, Turia. Nor in the courtyard. She's probably still in the shrine. I'm taking over her duties, so I'll look for her there."

"My lady, when I went to her chambers in the ninth hour she wasn't there then, either," the servant said with concern. "But I know she sometimes remains in the shrine for a long time when she's *sacricola* priestess. And I thought maybe she'd returned to her chambers while I was making my fire watch rounds elsewhere in the *atrium*."

"Well, don't worry, Turia. I'll find her, so you continue your rounds."

"Another thing, my lady. I haven't seen the night *janitrix*, young Minicia, for some time. She hasn't been at her post for a couple of hours, at least not when I passed through here on my rounds. I thought maybe she was ill so looked for her in the servants' quarters. The entrance is locked but I don't have a key so I couldn't look for her in the *vestibulum*. But she knows her post

is here in the hall, so she wouldn't go outside."

"So it seems we have two people missing," Marcia said lightly, hiding her mounting concern and trying to soothe the worried Turia. "I'm quite sure they'll both appear shortly and all will be well. Off you go, now, and don't fret."

"Yes, lady," the servant said uncertainly, then left.

Marica found the entrance door locked, as Turia had said. Where can the girl be? she wondered. Well, I'll look for her after I've talked with Serena.

Apprehension chilled her as she entered the passageway to the shrine. The sacred fire was flickering so low that she knew it would die within the hour. Pausing at the shrine end of the passageway, she peered into the near darkness. "Are you there, Serena?" But there was no reply.

Cautiously she approached the altar; the surface of its white stone table, softly lit by the dying fire, seemed to her an island of light in the cavernous dark of the shrine.

She rounded the altar and saw the white clad body at its base. Chill apprehension became cold fear while her stomach clenched, radiating shudders to every part of her body. The face, hidden in deep shadow, was turned toward the altar front, but she knew whose it was. Serena lay in the undreaming stillness of death.

Falling to her knees, she bent her face close to Serena's head and in the murky half-light could see that the eyes were open, staring at the altar. "My Serena," she whispered, then held her lips to the pale, cold cheek.

Her hand touched something hard on the floor. It was a dagger, lying in a pool of drying blood. She remained kneeling beside Serena for several minutes. She knew what she must do.

Closing the passageway door behind her, Marcia went directly to her chambers. There she saw that her left hand was bloodied and the lower folds of her *stola* strained with clots of congealing blood. She washed her hands, sat at her table, and took writing materials from a drawer. During the next several minutes she filled three papyrus sheets with her neat script. She held the letter to her lips, kissed it twice, then laid it on the table.

Marcia stood and gazed pensively around the bedchamber she'd known for twenty-two years, from the day she'd entered the Atrium Vestae as a nine-year-old *virguncula* priestess.

She thought of that long-ago day when she had been taken from her father's house and escorted by priests to the shrine of Vesta, to be passed from the control of her *paterfamilias* into the guardianship of Augustus Caesar, emperor and *pontifex maximus* of Rome. And now she heard again the words he had spoken to her before the altar of Vesta after they had shorn her childhood hair and taken the tresses to be hung in the sacred oak tree. "I take you, *amata*, as one who has fulfilled all the legal requirements, to be a priestess of Vesta, to perform the rites which it is lawful for a Vestal to perform for the Roman people, the *Quirites*."

Caesar called me '*amata*.' But I am no longer 'beloved.' Now I must join Serena.

From a small box in her bedside table, she took two gold coins. She replaced the box, extinguished the lamp, and left the chamber.

Standing before the altar, she whispered, "Vesta *dea*, Vesta *mater*, *mea maxima culpa*." In silent prayer she looked into the sacred fire of the hearth of Rome, its flame fluttering weakly in its last moments. Then she knelt once more beside Serena, kissed her, and gently placed a gold *aureus* between the stiffened lips. She picked up the dagger and laid herself face up beside her friend, putting the other coin in her own mouth.

She felt the prick of the dagger as she placed it above her heart. Marcia Renata turned her face toward Serena Hateria and with both hands pulled the blade deep into her breast.

CHAPTER XII

Late in the first daylight hour, I was in my office going over the checklist for the banquet in honor of Diana three days hence. Today's rites for Hercules have been deferred but Diana's festival will be observed unless the augury is inauspicious. Not likely, that. Two in a row?

I was in a foul mood after the fretful, sleepless night that followed my dream. Petronia shouldn't have wakened me. I'd probably have slept 'til dawn if she'd let me alone. And where *is* that woman? How long does it take to prepare porridge, anyway? She knows full well that I...

"Anthus! You're wanted at once." Silo, the night watchman, regarded me anxiously from the doorway.

"You might have tried knocking. Or is announcing breakfast too urgent for such courtesy?" It's customary to rap on a door, even if it's open, when attending someone in his chamber.

"I did knock, Anthus. But you paid no attention. You were muttering to yourself. And the master wants you immediately in his study."

"I do not mutter to myself, Silo! And furthermore... what? The master! Why didn't you say so? Oh, why am I beset by incompetent fools on every hand?"

"Anthus, I told you. You'd better hurry. The master seems agitated. And one of his officers is with him."

Brushing hastily past Silo, I sighed in despair over the pathetic state of the household staff. Breakfast late, a bumbling night watchman. And the day barely started.

The officer with Macro was Aulus Caelius Ballista, tribune of the Urban Cohorts for the Eighth city District, the Forum Romanum area. He greened me by name as I bowed to him. He's a good friend of Macro's and a frequent guest in the house.

"Ballista brings bad news," Macro said. His grave tone was one I'd never heard before and both he and Ballista were stony-faced.

"Two Vestal Virgins have been murdered. Their bodies were found at daybreak in the shrine of Vesta. Also, the night *janitrix*, a young slave, was murdered. And," he added, "the sacred fire has expired."

I'm seldom at a loss for words but on hearing this I was speechless. I stared at the two men, not so much mute from shock as simply not knowing what to say. Finally, I said, "The augury has come true. The shrine was profaned by two acts of sacrilege!"

"Three," Ballista said. "The servant was slain within the shrine's precinct."

"We can expect trouble once the populace learns of this," Macro said. "Apart from the general breast-beating and wailing over the threat to the welfare of Rome, the rabble-rousers will rant about divine retribution. They'll say Rome is being punished by the gods for its corruption and so forth, oh woe!"

"And corruption, of course," said Ballista, "will be laid at the door of those in authority, everyone from Caesar to the lowest magistrate. The honest shopkeepers and tradesmen are incapable of evil, naturally."

"We'll let the priestly colleges deal with the religious aspect, more luck to them," Macro said. "The Urban Cohorts will deal with the rowdies, helped by *vigiles* if necessary. In the event of trouble, no doubt Sejanus will want to set his Praetorians onto the mob, but let's hope it doesn't come to that."

Macro looked at me. "But our immediate concern is the murders. And that's why you are here, Anthus."

"Sir?"

"You'll come with us to the shrine of Vesta. But first, have breakfast brought here for Ballista and me right away. There are six of Ballista's men outside. Take them to the kitchen and have them fed. Tell the household staff to gather in the *triclinium* after we've left. My wife will advise them of the profanation and give them their orders. Be back here in less than half an hour in your best tunic and sandals with your *stylus* and several writing tablets."



Half an hour later the small detachment of city police marched through the streets, followed by Macro, Ballista, and me. En route, Ballista told me all three women had been stabbed, the two priestesses found in the shrine by the Chief Vestal and shortly afterward the servant girl was discovered in the front courtyard of the *Atrium Vestae*. The Vestals were Serena Hateria and Marcia Renata.

I knew of Marcia Renata, the one who'd been a guest in Macro's house and who'd recently been ill. The other name was familiar also, but from where? Of course! I recalled the tavern keeper, Corax, telling me that the red-belted man, Gaius Quintus Haterius something, had an adoptive sister who was a Vestal. Serena Hateria, that would be her! And I recalled Gaius Quintus in his shoddy toga on that hot day as we passed him close by the Mamertine prison. He had snarled something about a 'bitch' as we stood aside to let him pass.

It's not far from the Quirinal to the Forum Romanum and we were soon at the *Atrium Vestae* and its adjoining shrine. Several of Ballista's men guarded the entrance to both buildings. A trembling, white-faced servant girl unlocked the gate for us. As we entered the *vestibulum*, I noticed another policeman off to the right, keeping watch close to a woman's body lying near the foot of the wall surrounding the courtyard. There were bloodstains on the courtyard pavement about a dozen feet in front of the *Atrium* door.

The Chief Vestal received us in her office, a spacious chamber at the far end of the large entrance hall. Through her open windows I observed an immense peristylum, with colonnaded porticos, fountains, pools, statues, and flower beds whose soft fragrance drifted into the room.

The lady Cornelia, *virgo vestalis maxima*, greeted Macro and Ballista with dignity and nodded civilly to me when we were introduced. "I have wept for the three women," she said, "and I shall do so again, but now is not the time. There is much to be done in the next few days and it must be done with a clear head. You, Sutorius Macro, will have questions but before you ask them, let me tell you of my attitude."

She had been seated at a table but now she arose and went to an open window, her back to us. We waited in silence a moment, then she turned toward my master. "Sutorius Macro, what does this profanation of the shrine mean to you? Why did it happen?"

Macro returned her gaze without expression for a few seconds and then answered in the same forthright manner. "Lady, I'm neither a scholar nor deeply religious. What does it mean to me? It's easier for me to tell you what it does not mean. I do not accept this as a portent of evil, that the gods are displeased with us, or that Rome is on the verge of some terrible catastrophe. I leave all that to the priests. Let them haggle and squabble over such matters. No, my lady, the violation of your shrine does not leave me trembling over fear of divine retribution. If I tremble at all, it's in outrage at the vicious slaughter of three innocent young women."

"Why did it happen? I've already said it was not a sign from the gods. It was a mortal act. And why it happened is known by nobody other than the murderer himself. Our job is to find

that murderer and find him we shall. Then we shall learn the *why*."

He paused. "I hope, my lady, that you are not offended by my words."

"No, Sutorius Macro. You encourage rather than disturb me. Had you lamented over the wrath of the gods, wringing your hands in pious despair, I'd have been most dissatisfied. Like you, Prefect, I wish to see the person who did this found, tried, and executed. Religious blather will accomplish absolutely nothing!"

Edepol! I liked this old girl. She's not all that old, really, maybe in her late forties. She's handsome in a dignified, understated way. Her short-cut black hair is silverying at the temples, but her eyes are her dominant feature, dark, inquisitive, intelligent eyes. I wouldn't want to cross this lady. But it wasn't too likely; I'd been ignored thus far and kept my place quietly in the background. By my name, she knew I was Macro's freedman and by my presence assumed I was there in some formal capacity.

"My lady Cornelia, we'll look at the crime scene but before you take us there, please describe your finding of the bodies," Macro said. "Sutorius Anthus will make notes and although he is fluent in Greek, our documents must be in Latin, so we'll use that language during the investigation."

At his words I removed a *stylus* and waxed *tabella* from the leather *soccus* slung from my shoulder. Then I bowed to the Chief Vestal to signify I was ready.

She began with a strong voice. "I am awakened at first light every morning by the night watch servant. After washing my face and putting on a fresh *stola*, I proceed directly to the shrine. This is not an act of ritual. I merely wish to see that the sacred fire is burning and then offer my private prayer to the goddess at the start of the day. So it was this morning. When I entered the shrine, I saw at once that the altar flame had died. And then I saw someone lying at the base of the altar."

Her voice caught and she closed her eyes for a moment. Then, looking at Macro, she said, "I am not given to panic or undue emotion, Prefect, but when I approached the altar and saw another body, I was horrified. When the initial shock had passed, I forced myself to look closer. Serena Hateria lay closest to the altar, partly turned toward it. Marcia Renata was beside her, on her back, her head turned toward Serena. Both lay in pools of drying blood. A dagger protruded from Marcia's breast, as you shall see shortly."

"Did anyone enter the shrine before the guard was posted at the door?" Ballista asked.

"No. When I left the shrine, I went at once to my office and returned with my keyring. I locked the passageway door. I hadn't been gone more than a minute. I then sent the servant to your district office. I didn't tell her what had happened, only that it was urgent. Your tribune and his men arrived quickly. The body of the *janitrix* was discovered when the entrance to the *vestibulum* had been opened for my messenger to leave."

A middle-aged female servant appeared at the open door and knocked gently. "My lady," she said, "the *pontifex* and *libitinarii* have arrived. I have told them to await you in the entrance hall."

"I sent for the priest and undertakers while awaiting your arrival," the lady Cornelia said after dismissing the servant. "After you have completed your business in the shrine, the *lustrum* and *conclamatio* will be performed and the bodies removed."

The *libitinarii* are the attendants of the temple of Libitina, goddess of the dead. Only they are permitted to remove corpses after their priest had conducted a purification rite.

"When you found the body of the doorkeeper in the front courtyard, did you see a weapon?" Ballista said.

"There was none, unless her body is covering one. The only thing I saw was her keyring. It

was lying a few feet from her and still should be. I ordered the staff to touch nothing and to remain inside the *atrium*."

"Very well, my lady, please take us to the shrine now," Macro said. "I realize that men are not to enter the place but under the circumstances I'm sure you'll grant dispensation."

"Prefect, you already know my position on such matters. This is no time for false piety. In any case, the shrine is no longer in a state of sanctity and will have to be reconsecrated."

We followed her into the entrance hall and to a door near the main entrance. She unlocked it and led us through a short passageway into the shrine which was softly illuminated by windows set high on the circular wall, close to the lower rim of the domed ceiling.

The scene was as the lady Cornelia had described. Serena Hateria was close to the altar base, half facing it; Marcia Renata lay beside her. Marcia Renata's bloodied hands lay on her breast, an inch or so from the haft of a dagger which was embedded over her heart, as though she had tried to pull the blade free as she died.

The four of us stared in silence at the waxen features of the two priestesses, their eyes still open in death. Macro and Ballista had experienced scenes of violent death before, as soldiers and policemen, but this was my first taste of close-up horror. My stomach was seized by a spasm, and I felt light-headed. Willing myself not to show weakness, I pulled my eyes away from the bloody tableaux and looked toward the Chief Vestal. My panic began to ebb at the sight of that lady's dignified control, the serene nobility of her features cloaking the agony of mind she must surely feel.

I turned again the altar, studying it rather than the dead women. The metal brazier—it looked like bronze—set into a recess on the altar top is the symbolic hearth of Rome and its sacred fire is the symbol of Vesta, goddess of the hearth and domesticity. There are no statues of Vesta. She is one of the twelve great Olympians, but she is never portrayed in mortal image. The sacred flame is her representation. But now the flame has expired. Is that a sign of calamity about to fall on Rome? Macro think not, but I don't know. There is a cloud of evil inside this shrine and if it seeps into the atmosphere of the city...I just don't know.

My gaze moved down to the base of the altar and was caught by what appeared to be crude lettering scrawled on the white stone only a few inches from the bottom. I glanced at my master, but he and Ballista were off to one side speaking in low voices. I turned to the Chief Vestal.

"My lady, there is writing of some kind at the base of the altar. Was it there previously?"

She stepped closer, peering. "No...but see! It must have been done by Serena. Her hand is just below it! My eyes are a little dim, and the light was poor when I first came here at daybreak, so I didn't notice it. I can't quite make out the letters even now."

Fighting my revulsion, I moved close to Serena Hateria's head and squatted to examine the marks closely. On the smooth stone were inscribed a 'G,' an 'A,' and an 'I,' followed by a final smeared downstroke which trailed off to the bottom of the altar. The Vestal's bloodied left index finger lay directly beneath it. The lady Cornelia was right. It had been scrawled in her own blood by the priestess in her last seconds of life.

"The letters are G, A, and I, lady," I said, "and the start of a fourth which is incomplete. And you are correct. They were obviously made by the lady Serena Hateria."

Hearing my words, both Macro and Ballista stooped to look at the bloody scrawl. "I think she was trying to name her killer," Macro said. "G, A, I...the start of 'Gaius' perhaps."

"Possibly," said Ballista, "but it's the most common *praenomen* in Rome."

"Ah, yes, but this particular 'Gaius,' if indeed that's what she intended to tell us, is one whom the lady Serena knew personally."

Gaius! Oh, indeed the murdered Vestal knew one of that name, I thought. But it wasn't my place to enter the discussion of my betters uninvited. And I'd have the opportunity to talk with Macro later. I didn't have to wait, however. The Chief Vestal spoke up.

"Serena Hateria's adoptive brother is named 'Gaius'—Gaius Quintus Haterius—and I think his *cognomen* is Florianus. He had been a disappointment to his adoptive father, and I know Serena held little respect for him."

"I know a little of him, lady," said Ballista. "I was a *contubernialis* on the staff of Poppaeus Sabinus when he first became governor of Moesia. Gaius, also a cadet, joined the staff about the same time. I remember him as a lazy and arrogant bully. He was soon dismissed from the army while still a cadet. Poor health was the official reason, but we all knew that was a fabrication to protect the name of his adoptive family. The real reason was a lack of officer-like qualities."

"Yes, yes, so he was a rogue," Macro said impatiently, "and we'll certainly have a look into his current activities, but at the moment we have other things to attend to. Now then, Anthus, I want you to write a full and detailed description of everything you see here. And make a drawing that shows the exact location of the bodies before the altar."

He turned to the Chief Vesta. "While he makes his notes, lady Cornelia, I wish to talk to the night watch servant, in your office, if I may. Then, after Anthus and I have finished, you may direct the *libitinarii* to do their business and remove the bodies."

I now stood alone in the shrine before the altar of Vesta and her two dead priestesses. Although I was still uneasy, my initial revulsion and queasiness had dissipated, assisted perhaps by my concentration on the notes I made for Macro. I described the relative positions and postures of the two bodies, the details of their dress and the location of blood stains on their clothing and the floor. Then I made a sketch, as close to scale as possible, of the altar and the bodies as seen from above.

Six of the ten *tabellae* I had brought were now filled and I'd noted every detail I could think of. But as I put my stylus into the satchel, my eyes fell on the lettering at the base of the altar. Oh brilliant, Anthus! I'd omitted the most important detail of all.

Once more, I knelt close to Serena Hateria's head and slowly, carefully incised into the waxed tablet a true copy of the blood-scrawl—the size of the letters, their irregularities, and their juxtaposition to each other.

As I was edging away from Serena's head, I glanced at her face. I realized she was the Vestal I'd seen recently in the forum. Her mouth and left cheek were caked with dried blood, but there was something else, a glint of metal between her barely opened lips. Looking closely, I saw the edge of a gold coin. Someone had placed it in her mouth to ensure she could pay the ferryman's fee in the underworld! Her murderer? Who else? No, I reflected, it couldn't be the killer.

I examined the other Vestal's mouth. Like Serena's, it was opened slightly but unlike Serena's was not bloodied. A gold coin rested on the inner side of her lower lip.

I was adding this unusual detail to my notes when Macro and Ballista returned. When I informed them of the coins in the Vestals' mouths, they knelt down to see for themselves.

"The killer left the ferryman's fee in his victims' mouths! An *aureus*, too! Generous of him," Macro said.

"Sir, I don't believe that it was the killer who left the coins."

"Who else then, Anthus? The only other person to see the bodies is the Chief Vestal. I'm sure that she didn't do it, or she'd have mentioned it."

"Well, sir, it could have been the killer but what strikes me as strange is that both women were still alive when he left the shrine—the lady Serena for certain and quite probably the lady

Marcia, if we accept that she was trying to pull the blade from her breast."

"Ump," Macro responded.

"Surely the killer would have fled from the scene as soon as he thought his knife thrusts were lethal," I suggested. "He didn't even remove his dagger. I doubt he'd have taken the time to place coins in their mouths."

"You have a point, Anthus," Ballista said. "But it's possible that the killer inserted the coins and fled. Then, after he'd gone, the women recovered from the shock of their stabbing for a minute or two, long enough for Serena Hateria to write on the altar."

"Indeed, sir, it's possible. Yet, it would have taken the lady several minutes in her fatal condition to do what she did. Even if she were unaware of the coin, during her final exertion the coin would have been dislodged."

Both Macro and Ballista looked skeptical. But I was certain I was right.

At that moment the Chief Vestal entered the shrine, followed by the priest of the temple of Libitina and a half dozen *libitinarii*. The mere sight of the undertakers in their exaggerated, appalling garb was enough to chill the blood. They wore long red tunics; high, laced boots, and broad-brimmed black hats. But what makes them especially grotesque are their pointed beards, whitened faces, and sharp-pointed false ears.

The priest and his eerie attendants stood back as the Chief Vestal approached us. "If you will permit, Prefect, the *lustrum* will be conducted now, and the bodies removed to the sacred grove."

She referred to the location of the temple of Libitina and its mortuary facilities on the Esquiline hill.

"We are finished, lady, and will depart when the rites are over." Macro motioned Ballista and myself away from the altar area, saying in a low voice, "Before the bodies are removed, we'll have a closer look at this coin business and query the Chief Vestal about it."

The priest was given a long-handled hammer by one of his attendants. With it, he gently touched the shoulders of both dead women and returned the instrument to the attendant. He had claimed the women for the goddess of the underworld, his ceremonial hammer being the symbol of Charon the ferryman. Another attendant now opened the lid of a small ornately carved wooden box and held it toward the priest. As he chanted, barely audible, the priest took powder from the box and sprinkled it on the hair, hands, and feet of the two bodies. He then repeated this act with a liquid. Was it consecrated oil? Now his chant grew louder and although I couldn't understand it, I knew that it was an obscure Tuscan dialect. Our funeral liturgy has Etruscan roots.

The lustration completed, the priest nodded to an attendant and pointed to the dagger in Marcia's breast. The attendant knelt beside the body and slowly withdrew the blade, laying it on the floor.

"Wipe it clean," Macro ordered, "and give it to me."

The *libitinarius* hesitated, glancing at the priest, then cleaned the dagger on the bottom of his tunic and passed it to my master. Macro looked at it briefly and handed it to me. "Put it in your satchel."

"It is done, my lady," the priest addressed the Chief Vestal. She moved close to the head of Serena and extended her hands, palms uppermost, in a gesture of supplication. Three times she cried out, "Serena Hateria, *virgo vestalis*!" Then she did the same over the body of Marcia Renata.

The *conclamatio*, a ritual veiled in antiquity, wherein the newly deceased are called to by family and friends, is both an expression of grief and a last farewell. I suppose you could call it the final rite of passage in a life just ended. The funeral ceremonies which follow are more for

the edification of those still living. If indeed the spirits of the two Vestals were lingering nearby, I'm sure the simple, brief calling out to them by one who knew and loved them well meant more to them than the lurid spectacle of hired dancers, singers, professional mourners, and the ostentatious displays of their approaching funeral rites could ever do.

"Did you hear me, Anthus?" Macro's voice broke into my morbid reflections.

"Forgive me, sir, I was thinking."

"I said that Ballista and I are leaving to see the Praetorian Prefect. I want you to go to the *vestibulum* at once. The Chief Vestal has taken the priest and his troop of clowns to do the rites for the servant girl. When they've finished, take a good look at the girl and make notes. See if the killer was thoughtful enough to leave her a coin also. When you're through, go to Ballista's office and wait for me. Got all that?"

I assured him I'd gotten it and followed him and Ballista through the passageway and out into the front courtyard of the House of the Vestals. After they'd departed through the wall gate, I watched the priest perform the *lustrum* for the slave girl and the lady Cornelia make the *conclamatio*. "Minicia!" she called three times. The dead child, being a slave, had only one name and no title.

The rite over, I drew closer to study the body and saw the Chief Vestal kneel at the girl's head and gently place a coin in the mouth. She arose and addressed the priest.

"Minicia was a state-owned slave, therefore her funerary expenses will be paid from the *fisc*. You are not to stint. I will pay from my own purse any expenses which exceed the *fisc* allowance. Her funeral pyre is to be six feet high and scented. Her ashes are to be cooled with wine and her urn engraved with her name and dates. It is to be placed in the Esquiline gate *columbarium*. I shall attend her rites with some of the *Atrium Vestae* staff. This to be in the fourth daylight hour three days hence."

The more I saw of this spunky woman, the more I liked her. Beneath her no-nonsense exterior was benevolence and consideration, witness the fact that she would attend the last rites of a slave whom she barely knew. And I suspect that there was a veiled threat in her words, too—don't try skimping on the girl's funeral, priest, because I'll be present.

The attendants had placed the body on a litter and were covering it with a black sheet when I told them I wished to see the dead girl's back. The grotesque creatures—"clowns" was Macro's term for them—stared at me with insolence and continued their work. Before I could say anything, the Chief Vestal intervened. "Priest!" she exclaimed sharply. "This man is an officer on the staff of Sutorius Macro, Prefect of the Watch and of the Urban Cohorts! Your men will obey him, both now and in any future dealings. Do you understand?"

The cringing priest said, "Yes, my lady," and gestured to the pointy-ears. They removed the sheet and reluctantly rolled the body onto its side. The back of the tunic was stained extensively with dried blood and there was a slit in the cloth about eight inches below the left shoulder. Her heart had been pierced from behind. At the right waist were two bloodied streaks, as though the blade had been wiped clean there. I made notes while the undertakers waited impatiently.

"Place her face up," I decreed in my capacity of 'an officer of the staff' as the Chief Vestal had titled me, although that discerning lady knew otherwise.

There was, of course, a coin in the mouth, the one that had just been placed there by the Chief Vestal. It was a gold *aureus*, the same as those placed between the lips of the two Vestals. One of lesser value would have sufficed: a *denarius* or even a *sestertius*. Perhaps the lady Cornelia saw death as a leveler, with a slave as deserving as a patrician when it came to the ferryman of the underworld.

The black-shrouded bodies were now being carried into the courtyard. After a farewell bow to the Chief Vestal, the priest led the procession of three litters out of the gate toward the arch of Augustus under which they would pass on their way to the sacred grove of Libitina.

It was not so many days ago that Serena Hateria, *virgo vestalis*, had walked under that same arch preceded by her lictor. And little Rufinus and I had bowed to her, and the boy had remarked on how unhappy she looked.

Now the lady Cornelia and I were alone in the courtyard. "Have you further business, Anthus? I have many things to attend to as you can well understand."

"My lady, I wish to have one final look inside the shrine to ensure I have not overlooked any details. I won't be long. Other than that, the prefect will wish me to examine the private chambers of the two priestesses, but that can wait for a day or so." Macro had made no such suggestion, but it seemed like a prudent step to me. "In the meantime, we would appreciate the doors to the chambers being secured with no access to anyone until the prefect or I return."

"The doors to our private chambers have no locks," she said, "but I will have them appropriately sealed with the imprint of my personal *sigilla* and will place a servant day and night to keep watch. It will be at least eight days before the funerals and their personal possessions will not be disposed of until after the rites."

I thanked her and accompanied her into the *Atrium* from where she proceeded to her office, and I entered the shrine. After a thorough study of the altar area on all sides, I found nothing that I'd overlooked earlier.

I was about to leave, when I noticed the two statues flanking the large double door of the main entrance. Having been concerned with statuary recently, I walked over to observe them more closely. To the left of the door was a life-size Minerva in pink marble. The daughter of Jupiter, goddess of wisdom and the arts and crafts must be special to the Vestals, her image having graced Vesta's shrine for ages. As a schoolboy, I remember learning about Caecilius Metellus, a former consul who was blinded while attempting to rescue a statue of Minerva from a fire in the Vestal shrine over three hundred years ago. In those days the shrine was located on the Aventine hill, so it is said.

I went over to the other statue, a white marble Apollo.

A chill gripped my heart. It was the statue of my dream last night, the very same Apollo whose hand of stone had risen and pointed behind me.

As I stood fixed to the spot, Apollo's eyes impaled me as they had in my dream, then they softened and released me from their spell. Now I knew Apollo had been pointing to the grisly scene before the altar of Vesta, that the Apollo of my dream had tried to direct my eyes to it at the exact moment the Apollo of the shrine had witnessed the murder of Serena Hateria.

CHAPTER XIII

It was mid-morning before he heard the news. But when he heard it, it mystified him. Surely a confused account—two Vestals murdered! Two? He'd killed one priestess, not two! Yes, he'd slain two women, but one was merely a servant girl, hardly anything to make a fuss about. Yet the announcement stated that three women had been murdered, the two Vestals and the servant. How could that be? The two priestesses were identified by name, Serena Hateria and Marcia Renata. There was no mistake.

He'd silenced Marcia Renata's tongue once and forever—no threat to his future from that source now. As for the other, Serena Hateria's removal from the scene he'd planned for the immediate future also. But no longer. Someone had saved him the trouble. But *who*? Who had killed her? Whoever it was had done the deed shortly after he'd seen to Marcia. Had someone been in the shrine at the same time as he? No. He'd been alone.

The sudden thought came to him that the second killer could have been waiting hidden outside the House of the Vestals, perhaps watching him leave and then entering the place himself. But he'd locked both the *atrium* entrance and the wall gate. Instantly he recognized the absurdity. Locks are only meant to keep honest men honest.

Had he been recognized by the second man, if indeed someone had been lurking outside? He doubted that. The night had been dark, and he'd been muffled in his cape. And the helmet would have obscured much of his face. No, he wasn't concerned about being recognized so much as perplexed over the bewildering enigma.

So then, both Marcia and Serena had departed. Good. However, there was still a piece of unfinished business. The matter of the physician, Kastor. He also had been privy to certain recent events. In all likelihood, the physician posed no threat. He'd not be too anxious to reveal his particular role in what had happened, would he? Still, one shouldn't take chances. *Mortui non mordent*, as the saying goes. Yes indeed, dead men don't bite.



The shattered girl stood lifelessly beside Marcia Renata's bed, blotched face wet with tears and her throat raw and aching from the sobs that had racked her earlier. It was the most wretched, appalling day of the seventeen years of Tropheme's life.

Minicia was dead. Found early this morning in the front courtyard. Murdered. Dearest little Minicia, sweet-natured Minicia, her one true friend. How could anyone kill her?

She thought of that day more than two years ago when she and Minicia had been assigned to the *Atrium Vestae*, both of them frightened fifteen-year-old girls whose fathers had sold them to the state. Slavery had been made endurable by sharing her lot with Minicia. And service in the House of the Vestals wasn't oppressive. The Chief Vestal and her priestesses were fair, if a little remote. The servants were decently clothed and well-fed. They were treated better as slaves of the Vestal Virgins than they'd been by their own families.

Numb with misery, Tropheme began to do her tasks, unable to repress the picture of her friend lying in the stillness of death outside. She had asked the head housekeeper if she could go to Minicia, see her just once more and give her a silent farewell before they took her away forever. Nobody was permitted to leave the *Atrium* by order of the Chief Vestal, she was told.

And two priestesses had been killed as well, the ladies Serena Hateria and Marcia Renata.

Neither had ever scolded her or treated her unjustly and each had always given her a gift of money on Diana's feast day and during the Saturnalia. Diana's day. Tomorrow, on the *idus*. But no rites would be observed for the goddess because the hearth of Rome had been defiled. Tropheme didn't quite understand what was involved but she knew the city had to be purified in some way before the day-to-day routine could go on as before.

She began to tidy Marcia Renata's bed, the first task she did each morning before cleaning and setting in order the rest of the priestess's quarters. The bed was in disarray as though Marcia hadn't slept well. Next, she started to clean the grooming table but stopped in dread when she saw the bloodied towel beside the basin of stained water. Tropheme backed away. It would have to be cleaned but she'd do it last, when her nerves quietened.

On the writing table were a lamp with a blackened wick, a small wine pitcher, a drinking cup and three or four sheets of parchment. The top sheet had only three words written on it, but they meant nothing to Tropheme who could neither read nor write. Intending to place the pitcher and cup on the floor by the door, her trembling hand knocked the pitcher over. She gasped in dismay as a trickle of red wine slopped onto the table, staining the edge of the parchment sheets. Appalled at what she'd done, she seized the parchments and dabbed at them with her cleaning cloth, drying them as best she could. She opened the drawer in the middle of the table and carefully placed the sheets inside, hoping to hide her offence. She was mopping the tabletop when the door opened.

"Tropheme!" The head housekeeper glared at the girl. "You shouldn't be in here!"

"But, *domina*, I'm doing my cleaning duties."

"The Chief Vestal has ordered the chambers of the ladies Serena Hateria and Marcia Renata to be sealed, with everything to be left as it is! Have you touched anything, girl?"

"No, *domina*. I just made the bed and was about to remove the lamp and wine pitcher to clean them."

"Very well. You may leave now and see to the other Vestals' chambers." Then, more gently, she added, "And Tropheme, I know that Minicia was your close friend. I want you to know that we're all truly sorry."

The head housekeeper, born freewoman and old enough to be Tropheme's grandmother, held the sobbing slave girl in her arms, murmuring consolingly through her own tears.



Conscript Father of Rome and member of the College of Augurs, Plautius Caesennius Pastor was much pleased with himself. But, of course, it wouldn't do for him to betray this fact openly. No, not under the circumstances. So, he cloaked his self-satisfaction beneath a mask of sober contemplation, as befitting a senior statesman of Rome.

The city is mantled in a pall of despair, he thought. The shrine of Vesta, the hearth of Rome, has been defiled. Not once, but three times! The welfare of the senate and the people of Rome is in extreme peril.

And it was I, Plautius Caesennius Pastor, who predicted this! Yesterday morning on the *auguraculum* of Rome. When a *signa ex avibus* was given, it was I who read the sign from the birds. Oh, yes! My authority, my dignity are much enhanced, I dare say to the envy of my fellow augurs. When last were the auspices, the divine premonition, interpreted with such clarity concerning so catastrophic an event?

But really, he mused, is it all that catastrophic? Perhaps the gods, or some of them, are angry.

If so, then why? What has offended them? Or should I say 'who' has caught their attention? Surely the divine beings aren't angered at the entire population of Rome. That's rather unlikely. More probably only one or two citizens have indulged in a bit of dubious activity.

Come to think about it, the manner in which Rome is governed these days is enough to give indigestion to the gods. The incompetent Claudian lolls around Capreae, having emasculated the senate and delegated most of his power to that venal Praetorian *cunnus*. Yes, if the wrath of the gods must strike then let it be on the head of Tiberius. At any event, Rome has endured one disaster after another for eight hundred years, so what's one more? Let the priests and the pious brood over it.

Pastor was aroused from his reverie by his *tonsortor's* voice. "I have finished, sir. Do you wish your fingernails to be clipped today?"

Feeling his newly shaved chin, Pastor inspected his jowls in the mirror the barber held up for him. "No. You may leave."

The barber placed his unguents and tonsorial equipment in a box, bowed to the senator and departed. Alone now in his study, Pastor's thoughts returned again to the topic which by now, he knew, would be the focus of fearful speculation in all fourteen of the city's districts. Possibly by now even Caesar, in his island retreat—bad luck to him—had heard the awesome news. If the signal-stations relay had been commenced soon after the murders had been discovered. No, there hadn't been enough time for that, he realized. There must be at least a hundred stations between Rome and Neapolis. It would take something like ten or twelve hours to relay a detailed message that far. They'll certainly have dispatched a horse relay but even that would take up to six hours or longer.

So the *pontifex maximus*, curse his Claudian soul and those of his ancestors, will learn of the sacrilege sometime this afternoon, no doubt. He hasn't once returned to Rome in the almost three years he's been gone. Perhaps this business will bring him back. And perhaps not. He didn't bother returning to attend his own mother's funeral a couple of months ago, did he?

Leaving his study, Pastor went to the *peristylum* where he ordered the servant weeding a flower bed to fetch the household steward.

"Have a cold lunch brought to me out here and advise the bearers I shall depart by litter for the temple of *Jupiter Optimus Maximus* at the start of the ninth hour."

"You will require your *trabea*, sir?" The steward referred to the formal toga of an augur, trimmed in purple and decorated with alternate red and purple stripes.

"I shall. I go to convene with the college of *pontifices*, the *flamines* and the college of augurs."

Two hours later, carried up the Capitoline Rise by sweating bearers, Pastor basked in anticipation of the gathering. There will be nothing too obvious, of course, in the demeanor of the others. The reservation of good manners precluded that. But he was certain their treatment of him today would be tinged with a certain new respect, a hint of deference, perhaps.

He indulged himself with a fleeting fantasy in which a renowned magistrate said to his wife, "I had a good chat with Caesennius Pastor today. Excellent fellow, that. He's the one who took the auspices when the profanation of Vesta's shrine was foretold, you may recall. We really must have Pastor and his wife to dinner soon."

Ah, yes, Pastor sighed to himself. I dare say we shall have the pleasure of dining out often for some time to come.

CHAPTER XIV

Tiberius Caesar gazed at the misty silhouette of the promontory of Minerva three miles to the east. It was the eleventh daylight hour, the August sun westering in a cloudless sky. The sun-warmed water of the narrow strait between the mainland and the island of Capreae was veiled haphazardly by scattered patches of surface haze.

A few yards behind him was the Villa Jovis, his chief island residence—fifty thousand square feet of luxurious opulence and the centerpiece of an estate that covered more than two hundred thousand square feet of gardens, walkways, and outbuildings. Of the twelve imperial villas on the island, the Villa Jovis was the emperor's favorite, its palatial mass domineering the crest of a nine-hundred-foot cliff at the north-east extremity of Capreae.

An hour had passed since the signal station on the mainland promontory had sent the terse message by beacon semaphore. An official messenger from Rome had arrived in Surrentum on urgent business and was en route to Capreae. That meant the messenger had traveled by horse relay. The urban officials in Surrentum would have directed him overland, five miles across the promontory to the landing at its western tip. By now he should be embarked and heading across the strait. Urgent business? What is Sejanus fussing about now? Or, Tiberius thought, is it a message from Antonia?

From the base of the rocky cliff far below, Tiberius heard the muffled slosh of waves breaking on the bouldered beach. Although the sea was relatively calm, the action of tide and prevailing wind created minor turbulence on the island's east coast. He could see the ragged upper surface of the sea haze, drifting lazily to reveal random patches of water. Even without the damned mist, he thought, I'd probably not see the boat until it was almost here. I'll be seventy-one in a few months and my eyes know it.

"Damned if I can see anything," Tiberius said to a freedman attendant standing close by. "Keep watching, Ilus, and sing out when you see them." He sat down on a bench and closed his eyes, pondering on the important news about to be imparted to him. Yesterday's dispatch box from Sejanus hadn't arrived until first light this morning and the only thing it contained other than the usual official claptrap was the business about the augury and the deferral of Hercules' rites. He tried to recall why the rites had been cancelled. Ah yes, something to do with the shrine of Vesta, wasn't it? That old fool Caesennius Pastor forecasting doom and gloom. He would. Anything to invite attention to himself. Maybe there's been some development from his damned augury. Well, I'll know soon enough, won't I?

"Caesar!" His thoughts were broken by the lookout's call. "I have seen the dispatch boat. It's close in and heading for the cove."

Tiberius looked over the parapet to where the attendant pointed. "It was there, sir. I saw it when the fog cleared briefly. The twelve-oared longboat, Caesar. I would estimate its arrival at the landing in about five minutes."

The cove was a small protected inlet several hundred yards south of where they stood and the closest place to the villa where a small boat could dock in safety. A serpentine footpath climbed up the cliff from the landing to join a narrow access road which led toward the villa.

"It'll be a little time before the courier gets here," Tiberius said. "Wait for him at the head of the cliff path, Ilus, and escort him to me in the library."



Gaius Cassius Chaerea, tribune of the second cohort, Praetorian Guard, removed his cloak. He'd been glad enough of it in the chill mist that the longboat had entered shortly after departing the promontory. Muffled in his cloak, he'd sat beside the steersman in the stern, watching with fascination as the twelve *remiges* ran with sweat, straining at the oars in their light tunics. The steersman had told him the boat's crew were all Egyptians, a detachment from the fleet at Misenum. After twenty-six years they would receive a pension and be granted Roman citizenship.

But now, halfway up the path, even though the cliffside was in shade and the heat of the day dissipating, Cassius Chaerea was perspiring as profusely as the oarsmen had been. By the time he reached the top of the cliff, he'd removed his helmet, carrying it and a leather satchel in one hand and his cloak in the other. While he paused to catch his breath, he saw a man approach him, bending his head in respect.

"Tribune, I am Claudio Ilus, privy clerk to Tiberius Caesar. You, sir, are the courier from Rome?"

"I am. Cassius Chaerea, second Praetorians."

Again Ilus bowed. "Caesar has directed me to conduct you to him at once. Please come with me, tribune."

Chaerea was led along a narrow road past some small houses and then up a long winding stone stairway which ended close by the bath house at the villa's southern end. A hundred feet further they came to a door. A huge, scar-faced black man barred their way, his right hand resting on the hilt of a military sword slung from his waist.

"This is Cassius Chaerea, tribune of the Praetorian Guard," Ilus said. "He's a courier from Rome. Caesar awaits him."

The burly porter studied Chaerea for several seconds, then thudded a clenched fist against his breast. "Tribune!" he boomed, stepping aside and standing at attention.

A hundred *sesterces* says that black fellow's an ex-gladiator, Chaerea thought as he accompanied Ilus along a spacious, carpeted hall. As though reading his mind, Ilus said, "The doorkeeper, Milo, is a former gladiator, sir. They say he killed more than three hundred men in the arena before he was freed. Caesar favors attendants who possess skills beyond polishing hinges and handles."

They stopped before a large double door sheathed in copper and ornately embossed with a floral design. "Caesar will see you in the library. I'll announce you." Ilus knocked three times and opened the right-hand door, motioning Chaerea to follow him inside.

"Tribune Cassius Chaerea, Caesar. The courier from Rome," Ilus said, then bowed and departed, closing the door behind him.

"Cassius! You old bastard!" cried Tiberius affectionately, striding toward Chaerea with outstretched hand. "If I'd known you were the courier, I'd have met you at the dock! No, damn me, I wouldn't have. I'm too old and tired to climb that cliff side."

"Half-way up, I had the same thought," Chaerea smiled. "Caesar, it's good to see you again."

They had known each other for many years. As a junior centurion, Chaerea had served in Germany at the time of the loss of three legions by ambush in the Teutoburger Forest twenty years earlier. Tiberius had been sent by Augustus Caesar to avenge the three legions and Chaerea had served under him. Then, three years later, the year of Tiberius's accession to the principate of Rome, Chaerea had distinguished himself during the mutiny of the Rhine legions. For his service he had been promoted to tribune and enrolled in the knightly order.

"So, you've brought me important news, eh, Cassius? Sit down and have a drink while I read the damn letter. You can do with one after your climb up here."

"I can, Caesar. But perhaps you wish me to withdraw while you read the dispatch." He hesitated. "I'm afraid that it's disturbing news, Caesar."

"No, no. Stay here. You seem to have some idea what's in here, so maybe you can add to it after I've read it." Tiberius glanced at the *sigilla* on the wax seal of the tubular letter container. "From the Praetorian Prefect, eh?"

"Yes, Caesar. But the message is, I believe, one prepared jointly by Aelius Sejanus and Sutorius Macro. Also, there is a separate letter from the *virgo vestalis maxima*."

"*Mehercle!* This must be urgent. It takes a lot to get the lady Cornelia worked up!" He broke the seal and removed two scrolls from the *capsa*. Chaerea took his wine over to the windows and studied the terraced garden that lay between the villa and the parapet at the top of the cliff. The windows faced east, and he could make out the upper level of the promontory of Minerva, now illuminated by the setting sun; the lower part of the mainland still shrouded by sea haze.

"Well, damn me, Cassius," Tiberius said after a minute or two. "This is startling news. Sit down here and tell me what you know about it."

Chaerea glanced at the two letters on the table as he sat himself across from Tiberius. "Before I talk, Caesar, perhaps you'll tell me what the prefects and the Chief Vestal have related to you."

"Here. See for yourself." Tiberius slid the two documents toward the other man. Chaerea read them quickly. The prefects' report was an outline of events, starting with the inauspicious augury taken by Caesennius Pastor. It told of the finding of the bodies of the two Vestals and the servant and described briefly the action underway with respect to investigating the crime. It concluded with the suggestion that the situation could possibly ignite civil disruption among the criminals who seize upon such occasions for their witless vandalism and trouble-making. But the full force of the Praetorian Guard assisted by the Urban Cohorts and *vigiles*, if necessary, should prove adequate to contain an outbreak.

The Chief Vestal's letter was to the point. Addressing Tiberius in his position of *pontifex maximus*, she stated she had begun rites of purification for the shrine. She reminded Tiberius that two *virgunculae* had to be selected in the immediate future to replace the two dead priestesses and that only the *pontifex maximus* could preside over their induction into the shrine of Vesta. Lastly, she advised him that the sacred fire had gone out and, again, only he, as chief priest, could kindle the flame from a piece of the sacred oak to restore the altar fire.

"The facts are as described by the prefects, Caesar," Chaerea said. "I'm not in a position to comment on the Chief Vestal's remarks, of course. I really know nothing more than what is written here. One thing, however. Before I departed the city, Sutorius Macro took me aside and told me to inform you that one of the men investigating the murder of the Vestals is the same man who a few years ago looked into the murder of a charioteer. He said he was sure you would remember."

"I do, Cassius. When you return to Rome, tell Macro I've not forgotten the event."

"I will, Caesar. As for the prefects' concern over the reaction of the people to the murders, I'd left the city before the public announcements had been made. So, I don't know what happened after that. But knowing the city as I do, I'm sure there'll be public demonstrations. The louts will see to that."

"The louts, yes," said Tiberius, "but also I suspect there'll be a few of the gentry rejoicing in the idea of civil unrest, eh?"

"Because you mention it, yes, Caesar. I'm a plain-spoken man, a soldier and not a politician, so I'll say that your enemies are in the senate and not in the streets. If I've spoken out of turn, I apologize."

"You've said nothing I'm not well aware of, Cassius." Tiberius refilled their cups and sat quietly for a moment. "Very well, Cassius, now I must write messages for you to take back to Rome. You'll dine with me tonight and leave early tomorrow. I'll have you shown to your room. You'll probably appreciate a soak and massage after your journey. A servant will bring you to my private dining chamber at the start of the third night hour. We'll dine alone so we can have a good talk."

Tiberius wrote three letters during the next hour, all brief. Normally his correspondence was dictated to a clerk who then embellished the text with syntactical flourishes appropriate to the tone of the missive, but he considered the present subject matter too confidential, even for the eyes of his trusted clerk.

His letter to the Praetorian Prefect suggested that civil unrest could be preempted or at least minimized by rounding up known agitators immediately. If there were acts of insurrection, they should be quelled ruthlessly and ringleaders executed. He directed Sejanus to advise the two consuls and the First of the Senators that any action by word or deed from any member of the senate which could be interpreted as controversial would be considered treason. Tiberius knew his message would quickly pass to all members of the patrician and knightly classes, be they members of the senate or not.

Sejanus was to give free rein to the priesthood in their alleviation of the fears of the people over divine retribution. He directed that one hundred unblemished white oxen were to be sacrificed to Jupiter Optimus Maximus and an equal number of white ewes to Juno, wife of Jupiter, the cost chargeable to the imperial purse. Tiberius considered this a pointless expenditure, but he knew the populace believed that the surest way to attract the gods' attention was a blood sacrifice. And after the Capitoline hill had run red, the slain animals would be roasted and distributed to the people, a sure way to attract *their* notice.

This thought led him to also direct that the Prefect of the Grain Supply, Gaius Turranus—the old boy must be into his eighties by now but still doing a damned good job—should make a bonus issue of grain to those entitled. The Egyptian crops had been good recently and there wasn't a shortage.

His letter to Cornelia commiserated on the death of his beloved Vestals and vowed relentless pursuit of the matter. As for the two vacancies in the shrine, he directed her to request the two presiding censors to convene a committee composed of themselves, the Chief Vestal, the First of the Senators and the *flamines* to seek out and select candidates. When chosen, he would meet them at Misenum to accept them under his *potestas* and enroll them as *virgunculae* Vestal Virgins.

Lastly, he told her that he had ignited a fire with twigs from the sacred oak (which she would recall he had taken with him when he left Rome). The fires were burning in the small Vestal shrine close by his chief villa. Three virgin girls had been assigned to tend it day and night until the fire was once more burning on the altar of Vesta in Rome. As *pontifex maximus* he decreed that this would meet the requirements of the Vestal cult and that the goddess, most gracious and understanding of all the deities, would surely smile in acceptance of the act. Accordingly, the Chief Vestal herself was granted authority to rekindle the sacred flame in Rome.

No such perpetual fire had been established in the local shrine—well, there hadn't been time, had there?—but he would see to it tomorrow. To his mind it was another meaningless procedure,

but he knew he had to be seen to be making the appropriate observances. And another thing, he doubted that any virgins could be found on the island. Probably have to import them from the mainland. As for the twigs from the sacred oak he'd mentioned, that was a bit of a lie. But a white lie, he rationalized, because it'll make Cornelia a bit happier over the procedure. She's a sensible old girl, though, and will make the best of things. She won't rejoice over my decisions, but she'll cope.

His last letter, to Macro, was brief and to the point. He said that he'd been given the verbal message by Chaerea concerning the investigation of the murders. And, as in the case of the charioteer a few years ago, he wished a speedy end to the matter. Find the killer quickly and don't be too choosy about it. There must be ample candidates available, so get the thing finished with soon. If Macro wished to continue the investigation discreetly after the populace had seen justice done, very well. But in the meantime, execute somebody. After a fair trial, of course.

Early the next morning, Cassius Chaerea departed by longboat across the clear, calm strait, three sealed letters in his satchel.

CHAPTER XV

Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus wagged his head dolorously. "Eheu," he sighed, "my poor, dear sister. Beloved by all who knew her. Who? Oh, who could have done such a thing? To take the life of an innocent woman..."

"And the lives of Marcia Renata and the servant girl Minicia," the Chief Vestal interjected. "Three innocent women."

"Ah yes, yes. Marcia Renata, dear Marcia," said Gaius. "I have met her many times over the years, my lady. My sister's dearest friend. I saw her last but three weeks ago or so. You were away from the city, I believe, when I paid a visit to my sister. It was in this very room. The three of us had such a pleasant chat. And to think that now we shall never meet again. Alas, never."

"I believe you are Serena's adoptive brother."

"True. True, my lady." Gaius dabbed gently at his eyes. "But we were very close. Very close indeed. Ah, yes, for a few years there was some minor discord between us. Serena didn't look with favor on my commercial pursuits, thinking them unworthy of one bearing a patrician name. But in recent times we became reconciled and renewed the devotion we'd shared in our childhood." He sighed again, softly, hoping his grief wasn't being overplayed.

Liar, thought the reverend lady Cornelia. Can this posturing ass really believe I dwell in such seclusion that I'm not privy to the endless gossip of the upper-class matrons of the city? Oh, I know who you are and what you are, Gaius Quintus. And I'm quite sure you're here to ensure that I know where you're to be found, should Serena's will prove of some benefit to you.

"Dear lady, you are overburdened by the unhappy circumstances, so I shall not hinder you further. But I did wish to pay my respects and assure you of my readiness to be of service, should I be needed. I have taken up new residence lately. In the ninth district, the apartments of Spurius Felix in the Street of the Weavers."

"If there is need, Gaius Quintus, I shall send for you," the Chief Vestal said. "The magistrates are arranging the details of the funerals. An announcement to the public will be made in a day or two. As an adoptive family member, you will no doubt be contacted by the authorities to learn your wishes in the matter."

"My wishes?"

"Whether or not you wish to walk in the procession and such. You will not be required to give the eulogy. It will be a joint funeral and the consul Fufius Geminus will speak for both women."

She paused, watching him closely. "As for your adoptive sister's will, I have given it to the banker Titus Fronto, who by now will have placed it in the hands of the *praetor*. It will probably be executed in a day or so. Although I was a signatory to her will, I do not remember the details. If you are one of *heredes*, you will be summoned by the *praetor's* office."

Oh, my lady, Gaius thought, indeed I'm one of the heirs listed in the will. I even know the amount of my late sister's bequest, don't I?

He nodded respectfully to the Chief Vestal, then raised his grief-saddened eyes to hers. "Thank you for your courtesy, my lady. I am ever at your command. Now I will leave."

She accompanied him to the main entrance and watched him cross the courtyard. But she couldn't see the thin smile he wore as he passed into the street through the wall gate.



On the third day after the bodies of the murdered Vestals had been found before the altar of Vesta, Gaius Quintus received the message he'd been awaiting. It was mid-morning when a magistrate's *tabellarius* brought him a short letter advising that his presence was required in the *praetor's* office in the Basilica Julia at his earliest convenience with regard to the *testamentum* of the late Serena Hateria, priestess of Vesta.

He told the courier to inform the office he would attend in the eighth hour that afternoon. In an expansive mood, he gave the fellow two sesterces.

At the appointed time he presented himself at the Basilica, togate and freshly shaved, as befitted a patrician calling at the office of a senior Roman magistrate. He swept complacently past the *janitor* who arose from his table at the entrance, looking inquiringly at Gaius.

Inside, he discovered he was not alone. A dozen clerks sat at tables, all busy with one or more people who stood before them. Another forty or fifty people sat on benches along one wall. The large room hummed with loud chatter, much of it in alien tongues.

I didn't expect the magistrate himself to greet me, he thought, but I find this atmosphere *infra dignatatem*. Glancing around, he saw that he was the only person wearing a toga and, from the appearance of most of the assembly, possibly the only one who'd bathed that day. In disgust he strode back to the entrance, where the doorkeeper once more stood at his approach.

"I am here by appointment to see the *praetor*," Gaius stated crisply, "but I appear to be in the wrong office."

"If you'll tell me your business, sir," the doorkeeper said, "I'll direct you."

"My business, my good man, is of no concern to you. I have an appointment this hour."

Classy accent and posh attire be damned, thought the janitor. And for all his pompous airs, I don't see him wearing the purple of either senatorial or equestrian.

"Two things, sir. Firstly, I'm not your 'good man.' I'm the senior porter of the office of the *praetor urbanus*, I'm a born freeman of Rome and I'm a twenty-year veteran of the legions, twice decorated, once by the divine Augustus and once by Tiberius Caesar whose standard bearer I was when he commanded the army in the Rhine."

The doorkeeper paused, noting with satisfaction the deep flush on Gaius's face. "And secondly, sir, the *praetor* is not here today, nor will he be for several days. Now, sir, if you'll tell me your business, I'll try to assist you."

"Ah, well now, *emeritus*," Gaius said, oiling his indiscretion with flattery, "I'm an old soldier myself, eh? Yes, um, well, I'm here with respect to the will of a family member."

"A will, sir. Yes, you are in the wrong place. That crowd in there are applicants for the grain dole. Go to the floor above this one. You want the testamentary office. The clerk at the door will direct you to the appropriate officer of the court. Stairway's just over there. Sir."

The doorkeeper nodded in silence at the other's thanks and watched him as he left. Old soldier, are you? Sure you are. And I'm the governor of Illyricum.



Gaius listened patiently at first, then with mounting irritation as the ancient legal clerk in the office of Succession and Testaments droned on. He explained the law with regard to wills at great length, adding the bonus of his own personal philosophy on such matters. Now he was reading aloud from the fifth table of the Twelve Tables, a statute dating back almost five hundred years and the first legal codification of Rome's accumulated customs and procedures.

Forcing a solemn countenance, he hid his exasperation as the old man mumbled away about Vestal Virgins being exempt from guardianship...agnate kinsmen...when a freedman dies intestate...the deceased's clansman...debts bequeathed by inheritance...spendthrifts and those 'raving mad' forbidden to exercise administration. And on and on.

When the clerk finally finished his pointless recital, he produced Serena Hateria's will. Carefully removing the parchments from their container, he laid the scrolled sheets before him on his desk, placing small bronze weights at top and bottom to keep them flattened. The sight of the will aroused Gaius from the ennui created by the old man's monotonous dissertation.

"The *testamentum* of the late reverend lady Serena Hateria has been duly examined by the legal officers of this court," the clerk wheezed, "and it has been found to be admissible under the law in its entirety."

Gaius felt a tingle of exhilaration at the words 'in its entirety' which abated as the old fellow began to read the will aloud in his sonorous muttering. It seemed an eternity before the clerk came to the sixth page.

"To my adoptive brother, Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus, son of Marcus Domitius Florus and adoptive son of Quintus Haterius, I give and bequeath one million, two hundred and fifty thousand silver *denarii*." The clerk inclined his head courteously to Gaius at these words, then continued his reading. Gaius sat with stony expression, his heart racing with elation.

At the close of the eighth hour, Gaius departed the Basilica Julia and crossed to the opposite side of the forum where the banker Titus Fronto's office was located in the Basilica Aemilia. There he would make an appointment to arrange the banking and administration of his newfound wealth.

And after that, he thought buoyantly, I'll pay a visit to Corax's tavern, not too far from here. For old time's sake. He smiled to himself. Yes, they laughed not long ago when I joked about addressing the senate. But today, by Pollux—or should I say, 'by Vesta!'—I'm qualified by both family and wealth to achieve the senatorial order. I must cultivate a few influential people once the city has returned to normal.

When he left the basilica a short time later, he turned right and headed toward the Street of the Silversmiths. At the northern end of the forum a *praeco* was declaiming the day's news in front of the speakers rostra and Gaius stopped to listen. The shrine of Vesta had been purified and the sacred fire again burned on its altar. Various sacrifices had been made to various gods. A *consilium* of the censors, the First of the Senators and certain religious luminaries would soon select two novice priestesses for the shrine of Vesta. Details of the funerals for the two Vestals would be announced tomorrow.

Gaius maintained an appropriately sober expression at the town crier's final news item. Kastor, a *medicus*, had been murdered last night in his residential surgery in the fifth urban district. His three assistants had also been slain.

CHAPTER XVI

Augustus Caesar died fifteen years and one day ago in the ancient town of Nola, near Neapolis. His body, transported to Rome over several nights, the August weather too hot for daytime travel, was conducted into the city for the last twelve miles by an escort of knights.

I was an eighteen-year-old slave then and saw the funeral cortege of the divine Augustus from a distance. The ruler of Rome for some forty years, his funeral was accordingly a grand spectacle.

Today I attended the funerals of Serena Hateria and Marcia Renata and I'm sure the pageantry and ceremony rivaled that of Augustus. The event certainly surpassed the funeral of the emperor's mother, Julia Augusta Livia, a few months ago.

Macro walked in the procession, an official mourner, along with other dignitaries. The day prior he told me I was to accompany him during the ceremonies. So, I was able to observe them firsthand. His reason, should my presence be queried, was that as head of the *vigiles* and *cohortes urbanae*, he considered it prudent to have an aide nearby to act as courier should the need arise. His real reason was that he wanted me privy to all events concerning the two deceased Vestals, to keep my eyes and ears open. We agreed there was little chance of noting anything that would assist our investigation. But you never know.

Macro had assigned Caelius Ballista the job of planning the route and marshaling the funeral procession. He had to contend with a parade of people on foot, chariots and carts extending more than half a mile. It wasn't the length of the procession that posed a problem, but the fact that this cavalcade had to be maneuvered into and out of the Forum Romanum in a smooth traffic flow. But the open space of the forum between the speakers rostra and the arch of Augustus is only about four hundred and fifty feet long and two hundred wide. The forum may be the heart of Rome and focal point of the empire, but it really isn't very large.

For the last three days the two Vestals have been lying in the House of the Vestals, side by side, each on her ebony and gilt *lectus funebris*. From sunrise to sunset the people of Rome have filed slowly past the funeral couches, paying last respects to the two women who'd dedicated their lives to tending the sacred fire on the altar of Vesta.

It was from the House of the Vestals that the funeral procession would begin its way to the rostra at the other end of the forum. But the biers would be preceded by the half mile or so of the participants I've mentioned. Hence Ballista's problem: there wasn't enough space to accommodate such an assembly, bearing in mind also that a huge crowd of observers, including more than a thousand senators and knights, would be jammed into the forum.

Ballista's solution was simple. The head of the procession would be positioned on the Sacred Way at the point where it enters the forum at the eastern end. From there the long procession would stretch along the Via Nova on the forum's south side, turn onto the Vicus Tuscus and extend southward toward the starting gate end of the Circus Maximus.

When the procession began it would pass by the House of the Vestals at the forum's east end and proceed toward the rostra at the other end. Those components of the parade not required for the rites at the rostra would exit the forum at the west end and head along the Vicus Iugarius to the southwest base of the Capitoline hill. There they would wait for the conclusion of the rites and then lead the procession north onto the Via Triumphalis toward the *campus Martialis* where the final rites and cremation would be performed.

The rites were to start at the beginning of the fourth daylight hour. This meant the procession

would move off half an hour earlier, to enable the biers of the Vestals to arrive at the rostra at the correct time.

Macro and I went to the forum an hour before the procession would start. He wished to inspect the Urban Cohorts detachments positioned at several entrances to the forum to deny access to those unauthorized. In essence, the 'unauthorized' were the entire populace unless they wore the purple stripe of an aristocrat.

I accompanied Macro on his rounds, keeping to one side as he addressed each group of twenty or more policemen. "This is a very special day, and you all know it," he told each detachment. "And no doubt the usual louts and rabble-rousers will show up and demand their bloody citizen's rights to enter the forum. If so, just tell 'em nicely there isn't room. If they persist, club the bastards senseless to encourage their friends. You know your job, so do it. And each of you will receive one *aureus* as a gratuity for today's work. But if one of you fouls up, you'll damn well be flogged."

The promise of a gold piece to each man—twenty-five *denarii*, about ten days pay for a policeman—was ample inducement for attention to duty, but the threat of a flogging possibly enhanced their zeal. Nor was it an idle threat. As prefect of *vigiles* and the *cohortes urbanae*, Macro has authority to administer corporal punishment, even in the case of citizens who fail to keep their residential fire buckets filled.

At the rostra, Macro introduced me to the tribune in command of the small detachment which would direct the processional traffic at that end of the forum. He instructed the young officer that I was to remain with him until completion of the rites, at which time I would join Macro. Then Macro departed for the House of the Vestals to join the mourning party which would follow the biers.

The tribune studied me briefly. "You're the prefect's freedman, eh?" Yes, I replied. He knew that from my name. "Well, if he wants you here, he has his reasons," he said, "and that's good enough for me. Stick close to me. It's going to be a little crowded."

"I will, sir." I'm used to addressing men much younger than myself as 'sir.' This one was no more than twenty. Yet he seemed much older, because of his powerful build and square face with its domineering hawk nose.

His name is Titus Flavius Vespasianus. He chatted briefly, telling me he was from a small coastal town in Tuscany and that this was his last week with the Urban Cohorts. He'd just been gazetted tribune and appointed to the Seventh Macedonica, a legion serving in Moesia. I almost told him my father had died while serving with the Fifth Macedonica, also in Moesia, but held my tongue. I'm sure this young knight wouldn't have been much interested. And, from the little I'd heard about my late *tata*, he might well have given his life in a tavern brawl rather than on the field of honor.

Now the forum was filling rapidly. Hundreds of senatorials were assembled in the open space in front of the rostra and behind them were twice as many knights, with more arriving steadily. By the time the rites began, there would be a couple of thousand aristocrats filling the area that lay between the Basilica Julia and the Senate House.

The dark grey toga of mourning, the *pulla vestis*, was worn by all males, including myself. The females who would take part in the procession would wear white, the color of mourning for women. And following a convention of obscure origin, senators wore the narrow purple stripe of a knight in place of their broad stripe.

It was a fine morning, the blue sky dappled with those huge white clouds called *cumulus*, tumbling languidly as though being kneaded gently by the gods. The sun was high enough now

to brighten the forum, its growing warmth promising another hot day. Not a day to be draped in a dark, woolen toga nor to walk bareheaded several miles in the sun.

My reflections were broken by the throaty brass of horns in the distance.

"It's started," Vespasianus said. "Hope you relieved yourself earlier." His lips were creased in a thin smile. "We'll probably be here a couple of hours."

I wasn't too concerned about myself, but looking at the immense congregation of aristocrats, I was sure many of the ancients among them would soon be wishing themselves elsewhere.

We were at the south corner of the rostra, the Golden Milestone a dozen paces to our rear. From here we had a view of the space directly in front of the rostra, where the dignitaries would gather, and of the Sacred Way, along which the procession was now coming.

The flautists and horn players that always lead a funeral parade were now passing the Temple of Castor and Pollux. The old law of the Twelve Tables decreed that no more than ten flautists were permissible at funerary rites, a sumptuary law that curbs excessive expenditure and public ostentation. But there were twenty *tibicinae* leading the procession today, twenty female flautists, ten for each of the Vestals. The music grew louder as they approached, the undulating trill of the flutes accented by the horns' deeper pitch stressing the slow funeral cadence.

Now the musicians were passing the rostra just a few feet from where we stood. In a minute or less they would turn left at the Temple of Saturn and proceed into the *Vicus Iugarius*.

The dancers came next, about fifty women dressed in sleeveless white gowns from neck to ankle, with the exception of two whose *stola*e were dark grey and hooded. Walking before the dancers was a woman swathed from head to foot in white and leading a small, garlanded white donkey. Behind her were two *tympanotibae* beating a slow measure on their tabors. In their dark tunics, the drummers were the only male members in the group.

The symbolism of the dancers was obvious. Vesta is never presented in mortal aspect like the other Olympian deities. But because she is patron goddess of bakers and millers the donkey is one of her attributes. The docile creature turns the miller's grindstone. The troupe represented the goddess Vesta grieving for her two dead priestesses, portrayed by the two figures in grey who walked side by side in the center of the white-clad dancers. I think the dancers represented the spirits of Vestals long dead, welcoming their sisters to the underworld.

Following the dancers were twenty or so young girls about twelve years old. In knee-length white dresses, their hair garlanded, each child carried a large basket of fresh flower petals and evergreen sprigs. Every few paces, each girl strewed a handful into the road with a slow sweeping motion, embellishing the Sacred Way with scattered flecks of red, blue, green, yellow, and white.

The mournful wail of the *mortalalia* now rose from a large chorus of women following the flower girls. Four female *lyristae* walked before them, accompanying the funeral dirge on their lyres. The song was utterly unintelligible, a traditional piece in some ancient dialect that probably antedated the founding of Rome. But the dismal strains left no doubt it was a keening for the dead.

A *tragoedus*, bearded and garlanded with ivy, was next, with three other tragedians following several paces behind. Each would take his turn at reciting tragic poetry appropriate to the deceased. This fellow as doing a splendid job, his vibrant actor's voice rising above the joyless drone of the female chorus not far ahead of him. As he passed close by us, he was declaiming that the nymphs of forest and stream wept in their caverns, that the birds of the air and the creatures of the woodland were silent with grief and that the very oceans and mountains stirred in restless despair. There was something about mighty Zeus that I didn't catch. I do with

these poets and actors would leave off this business of referring to the gods by their Greek names.

But as I said, the actor was quite good. He would have written his own lines for the occasion, but I suspect he'd borrowed a little from Ovidius Naso. The allusion to naiads and dryads in their damp caverns tells me that much. Good poet, old Ovid. He died in exile about ten years ago. It seems he offended Augustus Caesar somehow, but nobody's sure of the details.

Until now the procession had been marked by the sorrowful euphony of flutes and brass, lyres and tabors, the chorus, and the tragedian, but now the only sound was the gentle chinking of chariot wheels on the pavement. As far as I could see down the Sacred Way chariots were being pulled, two by two, by teams of six men. The old Julian law prohibiting horse-drawn vehicles in the city during daylight hours is observed even for funerals.

Each chariot bore a man wearing a life-like wax mask. The masks are the *imagines maiorum*, images of ancestors of high rank displayed during the funeral rites of aristocratic families. The 'ancestors' were represented not only by their likeness masks, but each was dressed appropriate to his achievement in life. The *toga palmata* of a consul, embroidered with palm leaves, the purple-bordered *toga praetexta* of the *curule* magistrates, the *aediles*, and *praetors*. Two of the ancestral figures were draped in the all-purple *toga picta* of a triumphant general, with gold embroidered scenes of his victories.

Most of the chariots were preceded by lictors in grey togas, the same number of magisterial attendants the ancestor had been entitled to in life. Several of the masked figures had twelve lictors, signifying the rank of consul. And one was preceded by twenty-four lictors—a dictator! Most of the others had two lictors, the mark of a *praetor* or *curule aedile*. A few had no lictors, meaning that they had been plebian *aediles*—lofty officials but not possessing the *imperium* authority.

Each chariot stopped briefly at the rostra while the 'ancestor' stepped down and walked to the space immediately in front of the structure. Here he was seated on an ornate, backless chair inlaid with ivory, the *sella curulus*. This, like the lictors, was the privilege of a high-ranking magistrate.

The families of the two Vestals must have served Rome for centuries, for there were thirty or more distinguished figures seated before the rostra. Their position in the procession was based on historical seniority, the earliest ancestors coming first regardless of which family they represented. The last chariot carried the figure of Serena Hateria's father who died three years ago and was a consul thirty years prior to that.

The chariots were pulled to the rear of the rostra under the direction of Vespasianus' policemen and assembled in the open area in front of the Temples of Saturn and Concord. At the end of the rites, the ancestral figures would return to their chariots for the final march to the *campus Martius*.

After the last of the masked figures had been seated, the colleges of priests passed by. I'm sure there were of a thousand of them, each of the city's many temples and shrines being represented by anywhere from two to twenty priests. The *flamines* led the religious assembly, all except the *flamen Dialis* whose many taboos forbade him being in the presence of a corpse. The college of the fifteen augurs was at the end of the priestly procession and among them I spotted Caesennius Pastor, the man who'd read the auspices and foretold the profanation of the Vestal shrine. I'll be seeing him again soon. My *domina*, the lady Ennia, intends to have him as guest of honor at a dinner party once social life is resumed.

Silence now embraced the forum, a stillness accented by the gentle chirping of sparrows

atop the portico of the Basilica Julia. The bodies of Serena Hateria and Marcia Renata were approaching, led by flower girls scattering petals and carrying pots of burning incense.

Carried side by side, the biers were covered with purple cloth and, preceded by a lictor, each was borne by eight men. By custom they would be former slaves, freed by the wills of the deceased. Serena Hateria's will had freed more than a hundred slaves but possibly Marcia Renata, whose parents still lived, had no slaves. If so, her father would have freed several of his in her memory and they would have become surrogate freedmen of Marcia for the funeral rites.

In snow-white gowns, hair dressed in the six tiers of a Vestal, the bodies lay full length, heads resting on white pillows and a bouquet of white roses on the breasts. Wax likenesses covered the faces. After eight days in the August heat, some deterioration would have set in.

Following the biers were the mourners, led by the *virgo vestalis maxima*. From the little personal knowledge I have of the lady Cornelia, I know that behind her composed patrician aspect she grieved deeply for her two priestesses, as she did for the young slave girl whose funeral she had attended a few days earlier.

Behind the Chief Vestal were the families of the deceased. Serena's family group was small: her adoptive brother Gaius and nine or ten other relatives. Marcia's mourning party was much larger: her father, senator Marcus Renatus Livius, and mother Livia, two brothers and their wives and several aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Then came the official state mourners, led by Caligula representing the imperial family. He was followed by the two Censors—the two highest magistrates of Rome—and the two *praetors*, *urbanis* and *peregrinus*. Next were the First of the Senators; the Praetorian Prefect, Sejanus; and my master, Macro, Prefect of the city Watch and Urban Cohorts. Neither the city Prefect nor the Prefect of the Grain Supply were present, they being quite aged and not up to public occasions.

The biers were laid side by side, heads toward the rostra. The family mourners and Chief Vestal sat in a row facing the biers, with the state representatives standing behind them.

It was now totally silent. Even the birds were quiet as the consul Lucius Rubellius Geminus mounted the speakers platform of the rostra and stood directly above the biers. His *laudatio funebris* honored both women, given in a vibrant orator's voice I'm sure carried to the far end of the forum.

I remember him saying that the nobility of character of these women was exemplified by their choosing a life of dedication rather than one of self-indulgence. And he quoted an apt analogy from Tullius Cicero, that an actor doesn't have to remain on the stage until the play is over, that he will have done well to receive applause for the acts in which he took part. So, too, men and women should live their days constructively and should their span be cut off early, their time on earth was meaningful if they had lived in honesty and decency.

This isn't of much consolation to the mourners. But it is a good thought, to my mind.

Now Gaius Fufius Geminus, the other consul, took his place on the platform to give the *laudatio* for each of the family ancestors. Although he spoke only a minute or two for each one, this part of the ceremony took almost an hour. The 'ancestors' were extolled in the sequence of the procession, the most ancient coming first and each masked figure stood up as his accomplishments were proclaimed.

Marcia Renata's family received the first *laudatio*, for a consul of four centuries ago. The last to be honored was Serena Hateria's consular father who died three years ago. In between was an impressive roster of censors, consuls, *praetors*, triumphant generals, provincial governors and even one dictator. Rome's present grandeur was achieved by such great men as these and I felt humble in the presence of their surrogates seated only a few feet away in their *curule* chairs.

The rostra rites completed, the masked men arose and went to the back of the rostra where their chariots awaited. Minutes later they moved off to take their place in the procession waiting in the *Vicus Iugarius*. Two low-bed carts draped in white rolled before the rostra and the biers were placed on them. The men who'd carried the biers along the Sacred Way would pull the carts along the route to the *campus Martius*, then carry the biers the last few hundred feet to the funeral pyres.

Macro gestured for me to join him. I said good-bye to Vespasianus, wishing him good luck in the army. He thanked me and touched my shoulder in farewell. As he did so, a fleeting but acute flash of foresight told me that Rome had not heard the last of this young man.

I took my place behind Macro as the carts and mourners began to move and the senators and knights joined the procession behind us, at least those fit enough to endure a few more hours. From the forum to the place of cremation in the Field of Mars is about one and a half miles. But funeral processions move at the stately cadence of a casual stroll, so it took us almost an hour.

The sun was at its zenith in a near cloudless sky when we arrived at the cremation site. Beneath my dark toga I was soaked with perspiration. I could feel rivulets trickling down my ankles. Miserable as I was, I felt even sorrier for Macro and Sejanus. In their dress uniforms, both wore a polished bronze 'muscle' cuirass—breast and back plates with contours of a male torso—under which was a heavy woolen shirt. Each had a purple cloak, a *paludamentum*, secured to drape over the left shoulder. Their skirts were of heavy leather straps, the *pteruges*, which hung from waist to knees. At least I could ease the folds of my toga discreetly away from my body, but the prefects were denied this simple pleasure.

The biers were now being carried to the awaiting pyres which were about fifty feet apart. Each was a pyramid of several tiers, the uppermost about ten feet above the ground. They were completely covered with carpets embroidered in gold and silver.

Carefully ascending the stepped tiers, the bearers placed the biers of the two Vestals on top of their respective pyres. Then they covered the bodies from head to foot with flower garlands and sprinkled them with incense and spices. As they descended, they covered each tier with the condolence gifts of family friends—incense and spices from Syria and the lands east of the Indus River, from Egypt and Africa, from the farthest reaches of the empire. The rich scent of Jericho balsam, saffron, cinnamon, myrrh, frankincense, and herbal oils was already sweetening the air.

Their role over, the musicians, dancers and ancestral figures had dispersed but several thousand people remained, including senatorials, knights, priests, and other officials. While the bearers had been arranging the flower and incense, the large crowd was organized into a rough circle by some Praetorian Guard centurions so that it surrounded the two pyres, standing well back from them. The family mourners gathered at the head of the respective pyres and the state mourners stood between the two groups.

A kinsman of Marcia Renata approached her pyre, a burning torch held aloft. At the moment he held the flame to the pitch-coated kindling, eyes averted as custom demanded, the Chief Vestal stepped forward, extended her arms to the pyre, and cried aloud "Marcia Renata!" Two thousand voices then shouted the name three times. It was the last *clamatio* for Marcia.

The rite was repeated for Serena Hateria when her pyre was ignited by a kinsman. Torches were now touched to a dozen places at the base of the funeral pyramids and the crackling flames crept upward through the thickening palls of perfumed smoke. The interiors of the pyres were filled with oil and pitch-soaked timbers and the structures were soon ablaze from bottom to top, disgorging two pillars of rolling smoke into the summer air.

The mourning parties departed toward a large tent set up a couple of minutes walk away.

There they would take refreshment and wait until the pyres had been extinguished and the ashes gathered and placed in the cinerary urns.

I'd hoped Macro would tell me I was no longer required. He didn't, but before he left, he did tell me to remove my toga if I wished. I think he felt a touch guilty, although he'd never admit it, for leaving me alone while he was wrapping himself around a cup of cool wine in the refreshment tent, for he gave me three *denarii*.

"There are some food stalls over in the market," he said. "Have some lunch and be back here in an hour."

Remove my toga, if I wished, he'd said. It takes several minutes for a *vestiarius* to drape a toga properly, but I was free of mine in about ten seconds. The heat of the day was at its peak, but I felt deliciously cool, relatively. I wore nothing under my tunic. Loin cloths aren't worn when one is toga clad, for a very down-to-earth reason. I loosened my belt, pulling my tunic away from my body to let the air circulate. Aah, yes.

I draped the folded toga over my left arm and headed for the market on the edge of the Flaminian Way a quarter of a mile away. I bought two honeyed cinnamon cakes and a cup of an uninspirational concoction comprised of ninety-nine percent water and one percent pear juice. The stall where I purchased this pitiful potion displayed a crude sign proclaiming it to be Pear Delight, a summer drink from the recipe of the renowned gourmet Apicius. Should Apicius learn that his name was thus maligned, I'm sure he'd expire in a fit of apoplectic rage.

To the north I could see half a mile away the dome of the mausoleum of Augustus. I'd never seen it up close and there was ample time before I was to meet Macro, so off I went.

The mausoleum is massive, a circular white marble structure about three hundred feet in diameter, its low rounded dome entirely covered with earth. Surmounting the dome is a colonnaded rotunda, peaked by a larger-than-life bronze gilded statue of the divine Augustus. The statue's head must be close to one hundred and fifty feet above ground level. The rotunda is surrounded by small trees and shrubs, as is the mausoleum wall below.

Augustus Caesar built this mortuary for the clan Julius some forty years before his own death. Now it contains his own ashes, those of his wife Livia, his life-long friend and chief supporter, Marcus Agrippa, and of several other Julian kin.

I approached from the south side where the entrance is flanked by tall, pink marble obelisks. To the right of the entrance are two large bronze pillars, their surfaces inscribed with writing. I realized this was the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*—the accomplishments of Augustus, and autobiography written not long before he died and which he'd ordered to be placed outside the mausoleum after his death.

I wanted to read it all but it's a long dissertation and my time was limited. I did read the first part of it and the ending, though. It begins: 'At age nineteen on my own initiative and at my own expense I raised an army by means of which I liberated the Republic which was oppressed by the tyranny of a faction...' He was referring to his defeat of Marc Antony and colleagues. The last sentence of his history says: 'At the time I wrote this document I was in my seventy-sixth year.'

But now I recalled the words of young Vespasianus of several hours ago. "Hope you relieved yourself earlier." Possibly drinking the misnamed Pear Delight had triggered it but I desperately need to urinate. I'd never make it back to the Flaminian Way where there'd be public lavatories and it would be a few hours before we returned home.

The river was about a hundred and fifty feet west of the mausoleum, but its bank was protected by a high stone wall. No joy there. A few people were lying on the grass not far from the mausoleum entrance but the area between the structure and the river seemed deserted. I

strolled nonchalantly along the perimeter of the mausoleum as though absorbed in the beauty of the marble wall. When I reached a place I figured to be opposite the entrance side, I glanced around. Nobody. Quickly I darted behind a large shrub close to the wall and hoisted the hem of my tunic.

Walking leisurely back to the cremation site I reflected guiltily over having urinated in the immediate precinct of the ashes of one who was now a god. And yet, the divine Augustus had raised and led an army at nineteen and was master of the world at age thirty-six, a man who'd seen a few things and lived life fully. I doubt he'd be all that fussed over me sprinkling the side of his mausoleum. Just to play it safe, though, in case his divine attention had been invited to my deed, I'll offer a sacrifice at this shrine in a few days. Nothing ostentatious. Perhaps a pair of white doves to convey to him my message of contrition.

The pyres had burned low, heaped beds of flickering flame and glowing embers where the roaring twin infernos had stood. Staying well back, I watched attendants poking and stirring the fiery debris with long-handled rakes. At each site they were clearing a path into the smoldering remains of the funeral pyres. While this was being done a slave came from the refreshment tent, talked to the attendants, and then returned to the tent. He'd obviously been sent to find out how much longer before the ashes would be collected.

Two hours had passed since the pyres were ignited. The attendants were now pouring water on the paths that had been cleared and steam swirled from the hissing ground. The remains of the bodies would be in the center of the embers, so paths were made to provide access to the knights who would officiate. It's traditional that when a member of an aristocratic family is cremated, that knights, barefoot and wearing only an ungirdled tunic, must gather the ashes into the cinerary urns.

I drew closer to the nearest cremation site, that of Serena, as four knights approached, each carrying two large pitchers of wine. This was for the cooling of the ashes of the Vestal. The same ritual was being carried out at the other site. A knight stepped gingerly onto the still warm pathway and drew as close to the smoldering embers as he could; then he gently poured wine from one pitcher, then the other, over the small mound of ashes shaped earlier by the attendants. Once more, steam hissed from the embers as each knight in turn emptied his pitchers. Honor had been paid to the ashes and now a dozen attendants sprinkled water from large, spouted containers over the entire ash bed.

Each knight in turn held the urn while another retrieved the wet ashes with a long-handled trowel, placing them gently into the wide-necked cinerary jars. When they were through, the two ornately decorated marble urns were placed on a white-draped table at a distance from the pyre sites. An attendant went to inform the mourners it was over.

Half an hour later the mourning parties departed in carts, mantled in white cloth, and pulled by white horses. We were outside the Tullian wall where the daytime ban on horse-drawn vehicles didn't apply.

Serena Hateria's family headed south to cross the Tiber and thence to the *campus Vaticanus* where the Haterius family mausoleum was located. Marcia Renata's mourners went north on the Flaminian Way. There are many splendid sepulchers north of the city, a popular area ever since the divine Augustus had the idea some years ago.

Although it was late afternoon, the oppressive heat remained. To my delight, Macro ordered litters to carry us home.

CHAPTER XVII

"Where are my damned statues, Anthus? It's been ages since you conspired with that damned sculptor to talk me into signing a contract.

"Now, now, sir, it's only been about four weeks since you gave Iktinos the order. And you did specify Luna marble. Iktinos may not have found a suitable block locally and the quarries are some distance to the north."

"Iktinos, eh? Sounds like a damned Greek. Greek, is he?"

"He is, sir. Like most of the city's skilled artisans. That's what led Horatius Flaccus to make his observation some years ago."

"What! Horace! Damned poet! Have no time for poets."

"Yes, sir. But he was a tribune in the army during the civil wars, and his writing was respected by the divine Augustus."

I shouldn't torture my master like this, but he needs it from time to time. Reminding Macro that Horace had been a soldier in his day was sneaky enough but referring to his friendship with Augustus was a low blow. Macro is an admirer of the late emperor and anything Augustus thought or did was just fine with Macro.

"Very well, Anthus. What observation of the late damned Horace are you babbling about?"

"When he wrote that captive Greece made a captive of its uncivilized victor, sir," I said. "But I think it sounds better in Latin. '*Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit.*' It has a certain alliterative ring, does it not, sir?" The poet referred of course to the fact that although Rome had defeated Greece in battle over the centuries, yet Greek culture has predominated over Roman society from religion to the arts. So, in a way the Greeks are the winners after all.

We'd been conversing in Greek, as we always do but I refrained from mentioning this as an example of Greece's cultural hold on us.

"I've forgotten what we were talking about, what with your dissertation on the damned Greeks," Macro said in exasperation.

"The statues, sir. The sculptor has promised them by the *idus* of January but says they may be ready earlier, perhaps by the Saturnalia. I'll check with him soon and give you a report."

"Yes, do that. Statues, eh? Ump. Mars, I think. And another one. Hercules? Vulcan?"

He knew full well it was Apollo, but I played along with his little game of forgetfulness.
"Apollo, sir. A favorite of the divine Augustus."

"Apollo. Yes. Seems to me I saw a statue of Apollo somewhere recently."

"You did, sir. When we were in the shrine of Vesta. The main door was flanked by Minerva and Apollo," I said, recalling uneasily my dream of that same statue.

"And that brings me to the main reason for talking to you," Macro said. "The Vestal business. But first holler for Quintipor to fetch us another jar of wine. Something decent, not this wretched plonk we've been drinking. Damn me, Anthus, I'm a reasonable man, not given to complaining. But I could make better wine than this if I had the time for such things. You just tell that to whatever caterer you're in league with, eh?"

"Oh, I shall indeed, sir. Excuse me while I find Rufinus." I won't pass along Macro's remarks to our wine supplier, and he well knows it. It's only part of his blustering master *persona*. In the kitchen I instructed Rufinus to bring a pitcher of the same wine we'd been drinking, a good Picenum. A favorite, they say, of the emperor's late mother, Livia Julia Augusta.

A few minutes later, Macro nodded in approval after a generous sip of the wine. "Yes, that's

more like it. You must have let young Quintipor select it, eh?"

Quintipor. The affectionate name for Macro's favorite slave — 'Quintus's boy.' He used to call me that but when I became a freedman, he gave the name to little Rufinus. Only Macro can call him that; it's a personal thing between master and slave.

Then he abruptly got down to business. "The public mourning for the Vestals ends today. The priests have done their lustration hocus-pocus to purify everything in sight, so the rest of us can get on with things."

No one can charge my master with being overly endowed with *pietas*. As one in his position must, he pays lip service to the state religion and its endless observances, but it's a thin veneer. Not one to quote the poets, other than perhaps some of the bawdier tidbits from Ovid and his ilk, Macro would probably subscribe, however, to the lines by Terence: 'the gods may have created the countryside but it's mortal man who's built the cities.' Less chanting and incense burning and a little more getting on with the job is Macro's approach.

"So, Anthus, m'boy, it's back to work for you tomorrow. I've assigned Ballista to work full-time with you. He's in charge, of course, but he'll give you free rein."

I couldn't think of a better man than Aulus Caelius Ballista to work with but at this point I saw no need for teamwork in the sense of both of us returning to the scene of the crime. Many hands may make for light work, but not in this case. We'd only be getting in each other's way.

"Sir, I shall be pleased to work for Ballista. But may I suggest it might prove more gainful if I did the investigation in the Vestal residence myself?"

"You may suggest, Anthus, but tell me why, dammit."

"The first thing to be done, sir, is to unseal the two Vestals' chambers so I can inspect the rooms and the personal possessions before they're packed to return to the families. That will probably give me a chance to chat with some of the servants informally. They see and hear a lot, sir, and I'm sure you'll agree I'm well qualified for such a job."

"And what you're saying is that the presence of a police officer might intimidate them, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Whereas a charmer such as yourself will have them babbling like a brook."

"Not exactly, but they'll see me as more their equal and be less reluctant to talk. And, sir, I'm aware that I may not learn a thing of value, but..."

"...you never know," Macro finished.

He mused on this a moment or so. "Very well, do it your way. I'll tell Ballista."

"So I'll go to the shrine first thing tomorrow, sir. I should be finished there early in the afternoon, at which time I'll proceed to Ballista's office and report to him."

Macro drained his cup, belched, and sloshed more wine into our cups. "We only have a few more days, so do your best, eh?"

I raised my eyebrows. "Sir?"

"Tiberius," he said. "Got another dispatch from him. Worried as usual about civil unrest. Seems to think the populace will be baying for our blood if the killer isn't found quickly. Now, frankly, I don't think the damned mob gives a hoot either way. But the priests will stir the damn pot on general principle, encourage the rabble rousers. So, the First Citizen has decreed from his island retreat that we produce the guilty party in short order to show how clever we are and to prevent any priestly inspired riots."

"And that," I said, "means nabbing some handy thug and executing him after a fair trial."

"True, m'boy. But as I said, do your best."

CHAPTER XVIII

Lying face down on the massage table, Gaius Quintus, head burrowed into his folded arms, grunted in sensual satisfaction at the attendant's fingers probing and kneading the flesh and muscles of his oil-sleek shoulders and back.

As the attendant rubbed his lower back and thighs, working and pummeling the naked flesh with stinging slaps of his cupped hands, Gaius chuckled to himself.

It was all I could do to keep a solemn face, he thought, particularly when that bombastic fool of a consul extolled the virtues of the dear departed Vestals. Virtue, indeed! Serena, that haughty, sour, parsimonious bitch! And her dear friend Marcia, when not simpering in piety before the hearth of Rome, was pursuing other pleasures, wasn't she? Ah, well, they're both gone now. As is Kastor the physician. How convenient There's nobody left to point a finger at me, is there?

As for my high and mighty relatives, not one of them was civil enough to speak to me. Merely a condescending nod of the head to acknowledge my presence when we gathered in the House of the Vestals. And several hours later at the mausoleum, I got a farewell nod after we'd lodged the late Serena's ashes with those of her damned ancestors. Not a word in between! Well, to hell with all of them. None of them has ever shown any courtesy toward me. They're as bad as Serena ever was, even worse, the bastards. But I'm a member of their stiff-necked, noble, patrician family, their social equal whether they like it or not.

The massage attendant was now scraping away the sheen of oil with a curved, bronze *strigilis*, its blade making Gaius's skin tingle pleasurable as it stroked from shoulders to heels. Then a vigorous rub-down with a rough towel which the attendant folded loosely around Gaius's waist.

"Yessir, there you are then sir, all ready for the pool. Bit crowded today it is, sir. Yes. Now that the mourning is over for the Vestals, people are getting back to normal routine, eh, sir? Did you see the funeral procession, sir? Oh my, what a parade that was! Yes. And hot! The wife's cousin has a refreshment stand close by the Field of Mars, he has. Says he made more money that day than he usually does in a month. Yes, And..."

"Indeed," said Gaius, edging away, "well, I'll let you get on with things."

"...I figure he makes more in a month than I do in a year, does Scorus. That's my wife's cousin's name, Scorus. But you'd think he was a pauper to hear him talk. Yes. Now, sir, you take the time he..."

"Philo! Dammit, man, stop jabbering to that poor fellow and get over here. I haven't all afternoon to wait!"

Gaius and the attendant turned to see a large, white-haired man sitting naked on the massage table.

"Ah, senator! An honor to see you, sir. Yes. An honor. Now then, sir, today I have some special scented oil which I'm sure you'll...no? Very well, sir."

Free of the attendant, Gaius dropped his towel in a basket and pulled his loose bath tunic over his head, then left the massage room and headed toward the hot room. On his way he passed the entrance to the *palaestra* and paused to watch the activities. The games room was a large square about one hundred and fifty feet on each side, illuminated by windows set below a high rotunda ceiling. In the far corner three wrestling matches were underway, the participants' bodies gray with dust which was spread over a coating of oil and wax to prevent a body slipping in an opponent's grip.

Along one wall a half dozen young women raced each other back and forth as they rolled large metal hoops steered by a small, hooked stick. A few other women were playing a rough and tumble game in which they scrambled for possession of a *paganica*, a large ball stuffed with feathers.

Close to the entrance three men played *trigon*, standing in a triangle about twenty-five feet apart from each other. They hurled a sand-filled ball about the size of a large apple at random to one another. The ball had to be caught with one hand but thrown with the other. Gaius watched them for a few minutes. He'd never been a keen athlete but had enjoyed playing *trigon* years back.

Yes, it was time he got himself back in shape, he thought. Now that he was a man of means, he'd have to cultivate people of taste and influence. His goal now was to gain entry once more into the *ordo equester*. He had the financial qualification and was entitled to knightly status by birth. But having once been removed from the roll of knights through no fault of his own, of course, it would require the emperor's approval for reinstatement. That meant knowing the right people, those who could intercede on his behalf.

The days of Corax's squalid tavern and its unpolished patrons were over and done with; he had no need of them any longer. And that also went for his recent partners in the ill-fated grain ship venture, more fool he for having let them talk him into investing in their hare-brained scheme.

He wearied of watching the ball players and proceeded to the *sudatoria* where he'd pass half an hour or longer seated on a marble bench, the cleansing sweat oozing from his open pores in the moist heat. Twenty or more men and boys were seated randomly about the chamber which held four tiers of benches along three of its walls, capable of seating about eighty people. Leaving his tunic with an attendant in the hot room's antechamber, Gaius sat on a floor level bench where the heat was lowest. He nodded politely to a gnarled, elderly man sitting across the room from him. The old fellow returned the courtesy, then closed his eyes. The convention of the hot room was that people were there to relax in silence and not engage in pointless chatter.

Drowsily tranquil in the moist warmth, his thoughts drifted again to the events of two days ago. When the family had gathered in the Haterius mausoleum and Serena's crematory urn had been placed in a niche next to her father's he'd reflected with some amusement that the urn probably contained more wood and carpet ash than it did of the late Serena's. During the fatuous nonsense at the small altar in the middle of the chamber when sacrifice of oat cakes was being made to Vesta, he'd glanced discreetly around the place. There were about a hundred and fifty niches set into the walls, in three tiers, the lowest being about waist height. A quarter or more of them held urns, each with a marble square affixed beneath and inscribed with the names and dates of deceased Haterian clan members.

Some day, but not for a good many years, I'll be deposited there also. Oh, won't the shades of my adoptive father and sister rejoice over that! But long before that comes about, I shall make my name in Rome. Before long the citizens will know the name of Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus.

Three young men, chattering loudly, entered the *sudatoria*, oblivious to the glares of several older men annoyed at such a breach of manners. By their upper-class accents and the fact that they were prattling away in Greek, Gaius knew they were aristocrats, *equites* at least, if not patricians.

It was such as these he must cultivate from now on. When one of the young men glanced in his direction, Gaius nodded courteously with a quiet smile. To his surprise, the youth tilted his

head coyly to one side and raised his eyebrows. Uncertain of how to respond, Gaius pretended not to notice the subtle invitation, if that's what it was, and turned away as though absorbed in his own thoughts. He heard subdued laughter from the three and had no doubt it concerned him.

A few minutes later he arose and went to an antechamber where an attendant sluiced the perspiration from him with a *strigilis* and towed him. Outside the antechamber a dozen men in slave tunics sat on benches, chatting quietly. These were household servants waiting to scrape and towel their masters when they left the hot room. People such as Gaius who had no servant had to pay an attendant for such services.

As he passed them, Gaius reflected that it was time to acquire a slave. His new status demanded it. And I know how to handle slaves, he thought. From birth right up to the time my miserable adoptive father dismissed me from his house, I had servants at my beck and call. I'll only need one slave to begin with. But when I've made my mark I'll have dozens, then hundreds. I'll visit some of the slave markets tomorrow morning. An untrained lad, say about ten or twelve years old, should only cost around two, three thousand sesterces. Then in a few years, after he's been well trained, I'll be able to sell him for five or six times that. And indeed, he'll be well trained, to the whistle of the whip if needs be. I'll have to find larger living quarters, of course. But not right away. A small boy can sleep easily enough in the storage closet.

Gaius bypassed the *caldarium*. After the hot room he had no wish to soak in the hot pool. He proceeded directly to the tepid pool and, as the massage attendant had said, it was crowded. The buzz of conversation and the shouts of small children were in marked contrast to the quiet of the hot room. He luxuriated in the barely warm water for ten minutes, then went to the *frigidarium* in the adjoining chamber. The cold bath pool wasn't all that chilly, not in the summer months when the internal heat of the building had its effect. Still, it seemed icy enough after the warmth of *tepidarium* water.

When he climbed out of the pool and was rubbing water from his eyes, a naked young man held out his towel to him. Gaius thanked him and then realized it was the one who'd given him the come-hither look in the hot room.

"I'm Aulus Fulvius Tubero," the youth said with a lisp. "I saw you in the sudatoria."

Fulvius Tubero, thought Gaius. Patrician clan and family names. He bowed to the young man. "Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus."

Looking thoughtful for a moment, Aulus Tubero said, "Of course! I knew that I'd seen you before. You're the brother of the poor, dear Vestal who was murdered! I saw you in the funeral procession."

"Um, yes. Serena Hateria was my sister."

The youth laid his fingers lightly on Gaius's chest. "Well, it's all over now and you're done your duty to her. But perhaps I can help cheer you up a little. I'm having an intimate dinner party two nights from now. Just a few friends, no women. I'd love for you to come. Oh, do say yes!"

Gaius thought rapidly. The Tubero family were senatorials, probably nobles. Yes, he was sure there'd been a consul in the family some years ago. This was the social stratum he needed to enter and here was an opportunity laid in his lap, an opening of the door at least. This Aulus fellow was obviously a homosexual but so what? Hardly a rarity these days. Ever since the death of Augustus social attitudes had loosened considerably. Should I accept? Why not!

"I am honored by your invitation," he said.

"Oh, how nice!" Aulus gushed. "It's so exciting to make new friends, isn't it? And I'm sure you'll just love the people you'll be meeting. Now, here's where I live..."

He gave an address in an affluent section of the Palatine hill, told Gaius to dress casually and

arrive during the first night hour. Then he left to rejoin his friends in the *tepidarium*; turning back to Gaius when he'd gone a few steps to smile and flutter a hand in farewell.

Before leaving the baths, Gaius ambled along the lengthy, brightly lit corridor which led to the library and lounge area. The walls were covered with colorful, decorative mosaics and every ten feet or so were bronze and marble statues, separated by large potted plants. Outside the entrance to the library Gaius stopped before a life-size bronze of Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, good friend and chief of staff to Augustus Caesar and virtually co-ruler of the empire for many years.

Well, Gaius mused, old Agrippa has every right to have his statue here, hasn't he? It was he who built these baths out of his own purse as a gift to the people of Rome. That was when? About sixty, seventy years ago, I think. The *thermae* of Agrippa may not be the largest baths in the city but it's certainly the most aesthetic. When it first opened, Agrippa decreed that it would be free in perpetuity to all citizens. That was then but this is now. But the fee is small, affordable to even the lowest social order; and there has to be some income to offset the maintenance costs.

He left the building now and sauntered along the portico which fronted the baths, pausing occasionally to look in the windows of some of the dozens of shops which sold everything from hot food and wine to clothing, jewelry, and pottery.

The heat of the past week had finally broken, and Gaius relaxed in the balmy late afternoon air. It was good to be alive and have things starting to go well for him at last.

As he neared the end of the portico, a thin, scarred cat limped toward him, one hind leg held up to its underside. The small creature stopped, mewing pleadingly and looking at Gaius as he drew close. Gaius stopped and kicked it hard in its ribs, twice. He watched the cat as it lay gurgling and twitching feebly on its side, blood trickling from its mouth.

Gaius continued on his way. Yes, he indeed felt good.

CHAPTER XIX

"Unhappy as the reason is for your visit, I am pleased to see you again, Sutorius Anthus," the Chief Vestal said.

I bent my head to her. "Unhappy indeed, lady Cornelia. I shall conduct my business as quickly as I can."

We were in Cornelia's office toward the close of the second day hour. Outside her open window lay the large inner courtyard, still mostly in shadow. The morning air was scented with the dewy-fresh fragrance of flower beds.

"I'll examine the chambers of the late priestesses, lady, in your presence if you so wish. I act on behalf of the prefect, of course. We realize that nothing will probably come of it, but we must be satisfied nothing has been overlooked."

"There's no need for my presence. I'll have the seal to Serena's chambers removed first and when you've finished in there, the housekeeper will see to the removal of her personal possessions. Then the same for Marcia's rooms. The housekeeper will be available to you should you have any queries."

"My thanks, lady, but before I begin, may I see the shrine once again? Although I made detailed notes previously, I'd like to view the scene again."

Minutes later the Chief Vestal and I stood before the altar, in silent memory of the two women who had died at its foot. Cornelia spoke. "The shrine of Vesta has been purified and once more fire burns in the hearth of Rome." I detected bitterness in her voice.

"And possibly you're thinking, lady, that the perpetrator of the sacrilege still walks free. But he will be found, that I assure you," I said quietly. And you should believe it, lady, I thought. The *pontifex maximus*, Tiberius Caesar, has so decreed.

The front of the altar and the marble floor before it had been scrubbed clean of blood. A thin haze of grey smoke drifted lazily up to the circular vent in the center of the domed ceiling. I circled the altar slowly, studying it as the Chief Vestal watched. But I hadn't come to view the altar; I wished to see again the Apollo statue, fixed in my mind ever since I'd recognized it as the one in my dream.

"I'll look at the main entrance, lady." The large double doors, probably bronze sheathing over oak, were secured by three stout wooden crossbars.

"It's always barred except on special days when the shrine is open to women. And then only in daylight hours. But we know that the murderer entered through the courtyard entrance."

Yes, I thought, we know. I remembered the young servant girl lying cold in the courtyard in her bloodied tunic. I remembered Cornelia, *virgo vestalis maxima*, high-born patrician daughter of a noble family, placing a gold coin in the mouth of Minicia, base-born inconsequential slave—and weeping.

I stopped before the statue of Minerva. In the muted morning light, the pale pink marble gave the goddess an almost human flesh tone. "It's Greek," Cornelia said, "almost three hundred years old. And being of Greek origin, it's a statue of Pallas Athena, of course. But to us she's Minerva, the same goddess with a different name."

"Is her likeness kept in the shrine because of the Palladium?" I referred to the small wooden statue of Pallas Athena, said to be about twelve hundred years old, which is kept in the storehouse of the Vestal shrine, so sacred an object that the populace is not permitted to gaze upon it. Legend says it was given to one of the founders of Troy by Zeus. Centuries later when

Troy fell to the Greeks it was spirited away and many years later ended up in Rome.

"It's difficult to answer that, Anthus. The veil of antiquity, you might say, shrouds the story of Pallas Athena's statue. But yes, essentially the statue you see here is a vicarious symbol of the ancient image which is never displayed."

She gave a fleeting smile. "And don't feel bad because you can't see it. You'd be rather disappointed. It's a very small, crudely carved wooden thing. When Tiberius first saw it, his privilege as *pontifex maximus*, he said, 'If that's the best Zeus could offer to the damn Trojans, why'd he even bother?' But then, our First Citizen isn't renowned for his religious sensitivity."

Smiling dutifully at her anecdote, I went to the other side of the door and stood before Apollo, in the same spot I'd stood in my dream. The white marble eyes whose despairing dream gaze had penetrated my mind now stared blankly toward the altar. The right arm that had slowly raised and pointed to something behind me was now at his side, bent slightly at the elbow, the slightly cupped hand palm uppermost. The left hand held a lyre, just below his breast.

I must have remained rapt before the statue for a moment or two, for Cornelia broke my reverie. "You seem lost in thought, Anthus. Does Apollo mean something special to you?"

"I'm impressed by this statue, lady. It somehow reaches out to me." Which it had.

"Like Minerva," she said, "this one is also Greek, a copy of one by Pythagoras. The original is about five hundred years old but this one was made recently. In fact, we've only had it three weeks. A gift from a wealthy family in gratitude for our prayers to Apollo Healer when one of their sons was seriously ill. The boy survived. Our intercession might have helped. But the gods don't always answer our prayers, do they?" She gave another faint smile. "If so, every man in Rome would be emperor and every woman rich and beautiful."

"Sutorius Macro has commissioned a statue of Apollo," I said. "To place in the *triclinium*. It'll be similar to this piece—white marble, life-size, top-knot. But the lyre will be at his feet, and he'll hold a bow."

"A bow. That will please Macro, I'm sure. He'd see the god in his guise as Far Shooter, Silver Bow more than as musician and healer. And did he select the god's attributes himself?" Was it my imagination or did she have a playful glint in her eye?

"Actually, lady, I chose them, with the assistance of one of the household staff. I am Macro's freedman, his steward; not a civil member of his police."

"I already knew that, Anthus. Macro told me about you earlier. And told me he has absolute faith in your ability and loyalty, which he'd probably never tell you, knowing him."

"No, but he expresses himself in other ways, lady." Like selling me my freedom and that of my wife for a handful of coins, I thought.

"I should have thought Macro would choose a more bellicose figure such as Hercules or Mars," she said.

"Oh, lady, indeed he did. But I suggested that Apollo would be more in harmony with the dining room. A bronze of Mars will be installed in the *atrium*."

"We considered various locations for our Apollo, but it was Serena of happy memory who suggested the shrine. Her reasoning was good. We Vestals pray to him regularly in his guise as doctor and healer and he is the nephew of Vesta and the half-brother of Minerva. It seemed appropriate that he join them here." She paused. "Now I shall open the chamber doors for you."

The sealing of Serena's chamber door was such that it merely indicated the place was forbidden rather than to prevent forced entry. A filmy curtain stretched over the door was secured to the wall at top and sides by several patches of sealing wax that appeared to have been applied with a small trowel. I suppose that's the only way wax would be affixed to a vertical surface.

Each wax application bore the impression of a *sigilla*.

"Your signet, lady?"

"Yes. I know this is hardly a barrier to the determined, but servants have been posted outside the doors every hour of the day. I assure you nothing has been disturbed."

While the housekeeper and a servant were removing the curtain and its seals, Cornelia drew me aside and told me in a low voice that she'd had trouble at first with the servants keeping watch. "They're poorly educated, superstitious girls mostly," she confided. "They were fearful of the *lemures* of Serena and Marcia. I assured them that if the spirits were to return to this place, it wouldn't be until after the funerals. And that because Serena and Marcia were to be given proper rites and honors, their spirits would be benevolent, loving *manes*, not to be feared."

She sighed. "But these provincial girls are fundamental in their religion and can't see the difference between unhappy, malevolent *lemures* and gentle, harmless ones. I eased their concern a little by having two of them stand watch at the same time and then only for two-hour periods...ah, the door is open now."

Preceding me into the chamber, she looked at the unmade bed. "Exactly as it was when Serena left it for the last time. See me before you depart, Anthus. I'll tell the housekeeper to attend you after she's opened the other door."

I was standing just inside the door which centered on the large room and estimated it to be fifteen feet wide and twenty-five long. To the left was a tall wardrobe, its door panels embellished with vari-colored, carved floral designs. Half-way along the same wall was a bed, the head to the wall and small table to either side. Against the far end of the wall was a long table with assorted toiletry items laid out on top and drawers underneath. Beside it stood a washstand with bowl, ewer, and towels.

In the center of the far wall a large double window was half covered with heavy, dark blue drapes.

To my right, close to the door was a writing desk and a high-backed *cathedra* chair, the seat and curved back covered with ornately embroidered cushioning. Further along the wall stood a long backless couch upholstered in blue and gold stripes, with two small matching cushions lying against the raised, curved headrest at one end. Behind the couch a mural, a colorful woodland scene about ten feet long, extended from waist height to just below the ceiling.

Near the far end of the right wall there was a doorway. Between it and the couch a small table held a white, life-size bust.

On the polished wooden floor were three large carpets, all in the same dark blue and white pattern—one close to the entrance door, one between the couch and the foot of the bed and the other in front of the window.

My impression was of feminine good taste, conservative but not to the point of austerity.

The room to the right at the far end was as good a place as any to start my inspection. Before entering, I paused to look at the marble bust near the doorway. It was Augustus Caesar. Why him, I wondered, and not the present First Citizen?

The small ante-chamber was about twelve feet square, obviously Serena's 'quiet' room where she could read, sew, converse with friends. To the left of the doorway a couch sat in front of a window, smaller than the one in the main room but fitted with the same blue drapes. The opposite side of the room held two chairs and a low table on which rested a large lamp and two book scrolls.

Beside the couch on a corner shelf was another bust, this one bronze. The inscription at the base identified it as Quintus Haterius, Serena's father.

The white walls were decorated with a narrow mural about three feet above floor level and running around all four walls. Only about half a foot in depth, it portrayed rosy winged cupids against a black background engaged in various domestic and artistic pursuits, making wine, leading goat carts, picking flowers, dancing, playing musical instruments and so on. A carpet the same as the other ones covered most of the floor.

I picked up a scroll book. It was *The Conspiracy of Lucius Catalina* by the historian Sallustius Crispus. I'd read this as a schoolboy; it was a standard text then. Scholars extolled his literary style although I fail to see what all the shouting's about myself. About all I remember of the book is that Sallustius accused Catalina of dallying amorously with a Vestal Virgin, a frowned upon event. I must ask Rufinus if he's been exposed to Sallustius at his school. No. No, I won't. He'd probably treat me to a lengthy dissertation on the historian's strengths and weaknesses. I don't need it.

The other book was a collection of poems by one Albius Tibullus. Never heard of him, so he can't be up to much.

Nothing in the anteroom attracted my attention, not that I knew what I was looking for. In the large room I paused once again before the bust of Augustus and at that moment the housekeeper entered and bowed to me. "I am Popillia, sir. Lady Cornelia told me to assist you."

"Ah, yes, Popillia. I'm Sutorius Anthus, acting for the *praefectus vigilum*. The Chief Vestal has explained my presence to you? Good. I shouldn't take long looking through the rooms."

"You were admiring the bust of the divine Augustus, sir." She came over to stand beside me and touched the chin of Augustus in respect. "This was one of lady Serena Hateria's most treasured possessions. It was given to her by the divine Augustus on the day he invested her as a *virguncula* priestess of the shrine, a symbol of his guardianship."

Of course. That's why Augustus and not Tiberius. Augustus had been *pontifex maximus* whose ward she became when she left the authority of her father to become a novice priestess.

I looked first in the wardrobe, Popillia opening the double doors to reveal white clothing hanging in the left half of the cupboard, with three shelves to the right. The hanging robes were the traditional vestments of a priestess, said to be patterned after the wedding dress of women many centuries back. The ankle-length sleeveless *tunica* and the outer garment, the pallium, was worn not unlike a man's toga. The shelves held several carved wooden boxes containing the pads of artificial hair worn in six layers by the Vestals, the long rope-like woolen twists that entwined the hair pads, the sash girdles worn over the tunic, the white squares of cloth edged in purple which were worn on the head during altar rites, and some items of personal jewelry.

There was nothing here out of the ordinary and I moved on to the bed. The light summer coverlet was rumpled, and the white pillow still held the indentation of Serena's head. As the Chief Vestal had said, it was exactly as Serena had left it for the last time.

"I hesitate to touch the lady's bed, Popillia. Would you ensure that nothing is hidden there?"

"The beds are to be stripped for laundering when you're finished, sir. I'll do it right now."

There was nothing.

Next, I looked through the drawers of the two small bedside tables and those of the toiletry table. Nothing other than what one would expect. And nothing behind the drapes or under the couch pillows or in the writing desk drawers.

Marcia Renata's rooms were a copy of Serena's, the furniture positioned much the same. She had favored brighter colors than Serena, her carpets a bold grassy green edged in gold and her chairs and couches upholstered in a gay floral pattern. A large mural depicted a harbor scene with piers and ships under a white-clouded blue sky. It was a cheerier, warmer room than Serena's

more sedate quarters.

The bed had been made up. "Why is this bed made, Popillia, but not the other one? Does it mean that Marcia hadn't slept in it?"

"Sorry, sir, the bed was made in the morning by the chamber servant who sees to the priestesses' quarters. I came to tell her nothing was to be touched but she'd already started."

"Well, no matter. You may as well strip it now before I get on with the rest."

Popillia removed the bed linen and carried it to a large basket in the hall, saying she'd be in Serena's chambers for a few minutes instructing the servants in packing up the personal possessions.

Quickly I looked through the wardrobe, behind the drapes and in the table drawers. I even looked under the bust of Augustus, as I'd done in the other room. Nothing.

I found it in the center drawer of the writing desk.

There were four papyrus sheets. I removed them and laid them on top of the desk, side by side. A faint pinkish watermark-stained part of the top sheet and the edges of the others.

The first sheet bore only the words 'father and mother.' The other three were a letter written by Marcia Renata to her parents. I read it.

My dearest father and mother, I ask your forgiveness for I have sinned and am no longer worthy of being a priestess of Vesta.

For the past two years Cornelia, virgo vestalis maxima, has entrusted me with the office of custodian of the wills. I have broken her trust and that of my beloved friend Serena Hateria.

Serena has an adoptive brother, Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus, whose irresponsible ways led to Serena's father banishing him from the Haterius household and settling a small allowance upon him. In recent weeks Gaius Quintus sent a message to me demanding that I meet him at the temple of Saturn. He threatened distressing consequences if I failed. I attended him, accompanied by a servant whom I dismissed before I reached the temple.

Gaius demanded that I give him the will of his adoptive sister Serena. He said that if I refused, informers would report to the Praetorian Prefect that my father was guilty of treason and that witnesses would support such a charge. I know too late that I acted wrongly but I was terrified by his threat.

I sent him the will the next day and three days later he returned it. The seals were intact, but I knew he had opened it. Why else would he have wanted it? Since then, I have had nothing else on my mind and am tormented by guilt. Because he kept the will three days, he must have had it falsified, surely in his own favor.

A few minutes ago, I found Serena dead before the altar of Vesta. She had been murdered. It is I who have caused her death. I am certain Gaius Quintus killed her or had someone else kill her because of the will. There is another possibility. I have been the duty priestess for the past twenty-four hours but last night Serena took my place because I was ill. Nobody knew this except Serena and I and a couple of night servants. Gaius Quintus may have wanted to kill me as the only person who knew of his tempering with the will. When he slew Serena, he may have thought she was me in the gloom of the shrine. In either instance, I am responsible for her death.

It is the twelfth night our and soon it will be daybreak. I am going now join my dearest, most beloved friend before the altar of Vesta. I love you, father and mother.

Forever hail and farewell. Marcia Renata

CHAPTER XX

Gaius Quintus leaned on the railing of his second story balcony, idly observing the street scene below, thinking about his dinner host of that evening.

Aulus Fulvius Tubero is undoubtedly a homosexual—the way he speaks, his body language, the come-hither eyes. Well, nothing too unusual there, Gaius thought. Homosexuality is viewed with disfavor by all social classes but it's here anyway, isn't it? And that includes the wealthy and privileged. Oh, it especially includes that crowd. They say that even Tiberius indulges himself with young boys on his island. So what? As long as he's happy, who cares? Not me. I just hope the old fool is in a happy frame of mind when he considers my restoration to the equestrian order. That won't be for a while, not until I've been accepted into higher circles again. Where I damn well belong by rights.

Fulvius Tubero. He's a mincing dandy and, I suspect, a cocky spoiled brat. But he has the right pedigree. That's all that matters to me. I can use him and use him I will. In the meantime, if he's looking for some sexual diversion with me, why not? It wouldn't be my first time, after all.

He watched a four-man litter passing by in the street, side curtains drawn and two slaves following with baskets and parcels. I'll take a litter tonight, he thought. I don't want to arrive tired and sweaty. Better take a gift along for Aulus. What? There are lots of attractive things in the shops at the baths. A colored sports tunic? Or perhaps a large bath towel. It wouldn't seem an ostentatious gesture if I say something like, 'I thought this an appropriate gift because we first met in the *sudatoria*.' I'll look in the shops after I leave the baths.

Early that afternoon Gaius Quintus walked along the row of shops which fronted the baths of Agrippa. The cat which he'd kicked the day before still lay on the sidewalk, flies crawling over its head.

Indignantly he pointed to the dead creature and said to a passer-by, "Why can't the city officials keep our streets clean?"

CHAPTER XXI

"Ho, Macro!" I cried aloud. "Have I got something for you!" I read the letter again. The old expression came to mind—*mortui non mordent*. Dead men tell no tales? If Gaius Quintus had relied on that, he was badly mistaken. Here was the voice of a dead woman telling her tale and pointing a finger directly at him from the underworld.

And yet, I had a vague uneasiness about the letter.

Popillia returned, apologizing for being away so long. She stared at the letter on the table. "You've found something, sir?"

"This was in the table drawer. It's a letter written by Marcia Renata. I don't understand why she'd have left it out of sight. It's something I'm sure she'd have wanted found right away."

The housekeeper stroked her chin. "I told you that a servant had started to clean the chamber before I had time to tell her to leave it as it was," she said. "When I came in, she was cleaning the top of this table. She was terribly upset. The girl Minicia who was found dead in the courtyard that morning was her best friend. Now then, sir, I wonder if she put the letter in the drawer."

"I'd like to talk with her if she's available."

A few minutes later, Popillia brought a frightened-looking young woman into the room. "This is Tropheme, sir." Turning to the girl, she said, "Sutorius Anthus wishes to ask you some questions. Don't look so worried. He won't bite you."

Tropheme was, I'd say, about seventeen or eighteen, with a plain face compensated for by large brown eyes and lustrous shoulder length black hair. She reminded me of another slave girl I'd met seven years ago. My wife, Petronia.

I smiled at her, affirming Popillia's assurance that I didn't bite. "I'm interested in these sheets of papyrus, Tropheme." I indicated the letter on the table. "Now, when you were cleaning..."

"Oh, sir, I didn't mean to do it! It was an accident." The unhappy girl stared at the letter, eyes moist and twisting her hands in anguish. "I was so upset that morning," she sobbed.

I took her arm and led her to the chair before the table. "Sit down and relax, Tropheme. Don't be afraid, I'm not accusing you of anything. Just tell me what happened before Popillia came into the room."

"After I made the bed, I began to clean the writing table. There was a wine cup and a small pitcher. I went to pick them up and I...I knocked over the pitcher and a bit of wine spilled onto the papyrus."

She looked at both of us in misery and Popillia touched her shoulder reassuringly. "When I came in, the letter wasn't on the table," the housekeeper said gently. "Did you put it in the drawer?"

Tropheme nodded unhappily. "Yes, *domina*. I tried to wipe the wine from the papyrus with my cleaning cloth and then I put the sheets in the drawer. I was afraid of being punished."

So now I knew why the letter was hidden away and also what had caused the pinkish stains. Well, no real harm had resulted from the girl's act, only a short delay in apprehending the murderer.

"You've been honest with me, Tropheme, and you won't be punished so don't worry." I glanced at Popillia, who needed in agreement. Taking an *aureus* from my tunic, I handed it to the girl. "A gold piece for your help, Tropheme. Buy yourself a present." She looked hesitantly at Popillia who said, "Take it, girl. And you may leave us now."

Teary-eyed, the girl thanked me, bowed, and departed. "That was good of you, sir," Popillia

said. "She was terrified, and you treated her kindly. The poor thing is still distressed over the loss of her friend."

There being nothing more to do in the Vestals' chambers, I thanked the housekeeper and went to see the Chief Vestal.



The lady Cornelia read the letter twice, as I had done, then returned it to me wordlessly. I put it in my satchel and, waiting for her to speak, stared out the open window. The inner courtyard was now awash in the late morning sunshine.

"Come," she said, arising. "We'll go into the courtyard." We strolled leisurely before a portico that protected a long row of statues of former Vestals. She pointed to one of the large goldfish pools in the center of the court. "That bench by the pool? It was a favorite place for Serena and Marcia. As small girls during their novice years they would sit there together in their leisure hours. And later as grown women."

At the far end of the court, she sat on a shaded bench and gestured for me to join her.

"I wish to talk where we can't be overheard. First, tell me why you have shown me Marcia's letter. You could well have given it directly to Sutorius Macro."

"I could have, lady, but I considered that you should be aware of its contents. The crimes were committed in your shrine. And in your precinct," I added, thinking of the murdered slave. "And you have known the two priestesses since their childhood and been their guardian for more than twenty years. You look askance at me, lady. Yes, I know the *pontifex maximus* is the *de jure* guardian of the Vestals, but *de facto* it has been you, not Tiberius Caesar nor his predecessor, who have nurtured your wards. Forgive me if I speak too boldly."

"*Edecas!*" she exclaimed. "You're as forthright as your master! I appreciate your sentiments, Anthus, but Macro may be displeased that you showed the letter to me first."

"I'm aware of that, lady. In fact, I should have taken it directly to Caelius Ballista who's my immediate superior in this matter. Well, if my masters are unhappy, I'll have to face it later."

"They won't be," she said. "After all, it was I who found the letter when we were looking through the chambers. Surely you remember? After I read it, I gave it to you."

"*Splendide mendax, lady?*" I smiled. "An untruth that helps someone but harms nobody else. Thank you."

"But perhaps there's another reason you wished me to see the letter?"

I've been much impressed by the Chief Vestal ever since meeting her so wasn't too surprised to find her reading my mind. She continued before I could reply.

"Like myself, Sutorius Anthus, you may wonder if Marcia's reason for meeting the demand of Gaius Quintus isn't quite substantial enough. Oh yes, the threat he made concerning her father would surely have frightened her. But flighty as she was in some ways, Marcia was not stupid. After she'd thought about it, I'm sure she'd have come to me with the story. She knew full well that I have considerable influence in high places. And yet, she didn't approach me."

"My lady," I cried, "that's exactly what's on my mind! It seems to me that something is left unsaid in her letter, although I'm sure the letter as it stands is adequate grounds for Gaius to be arrested. And I'm sure also that Macro won't worry about seeking a more 'substantial' reason."

"Yes," she said, "but you and I do wonder about it. And so I shall tell you what I'm certain was left unsaid."

That caught my attention.

"This is a privileged conversation, Sutorius Anthus. Please omit the drama of clasping your breast and swearing by the pantheon of gods and the ashes of your fathers. Simply tell me that what I'm about to relate will go no further."

"I promise you, lady Cornelia." I looked directly into her intelligent, gray eyes.

Quietly, with emotion, she told me that in the early weeks of July she suspected Marcia was pregnant. She'd known Marcia more than twenty-two years, knew her moods, habits, attitudes, knew as much about her as one can know about another person. And she knew that Serena Hateria was also aware of the change in her friend. Cornelia had even deduced the occasion on which Marica had probably compromised herself.

The Chief Vestals who had preceded Cornelia might well have let things run their course, terminating in the execution of the wayward priestess, although it wouldn't be an execution in the legal sense. It was a sacrilege to lay a hand on a Vestal Virgin. She was allowed to starve to death, sealed alive in an underground pit.

This was not Cornelia's way. To her, a priestess of Vesta is a mortal woman like any other and with the same sensual urges. How could a six- or seven-year-old girl make a vow of chastity at an age when she didn't know the meaning of the word? And look about you. High-minded orations in the senate and sermonizing by the priests while the populace at large ruts like boars and sows, while prostitutes, both male and female, flourish in the brothels and under the arches. Look each morning on the trash piles of Rome and gaze upon the unwanted newborn babies, most dead from exposure but some still alive as dogs, rats, and carrion birds tear at them.

"This is all around us, Anthus," she said. "But let a priestess make a mistake and it's 'Bury her alive!' from the mouths of handwringing, pious hypocrites, high and low alike, from the mouths of those who commit more sins in a week than a priestess does in her lifetime."

She'd been gazing into the distance as she spoke but now she looked at me. "If my words make you uneasy, make you think that I rebel against the state religion, it isn't so. What I rebel against is the imposition of mortal hypocrisy upon it. For thirty-seven years I've been a Vestal, and Chief Vestal for the past nine. I am at one with the goddess I serve. I know her for a gentle and loving deity, unlike most of the gods and goddesses whose histories are rampant with violence and avarice. Most of them would demand punishment for mortal transgression. Vesta would forgive."

When she was sure Marcia was pregnant, she realized it would be imprudent for her to intervene directly. But she knew that Serena was concerned about her friend so decided to absent herself for several days from the House of the Vestals, giving Serena an opportunity to learn of Marcia's problem and, hopefully, to act upon it. Before departing to visit family in Puteoli, she suggested to Serena that she should try to determine the cause of Marcia's unrest.

Ten days later, when Cornelia returned to Rome, she knew Marcia's problem had been resolved. Although she'd suffered from a liver ailment during the Chief Vestal's absence, Marcia was recovering satisfactorily and seemed in good spirits. And between Cornelia and Serena there was a tacit bond of understanding.

"And that, Anthus, is why Marcia was terrified of Gaius Quintus, I am certain. He had somehow learned of her abortion and threatened to expose her. Oh yes, he undoubtedly also threatened the fabricated treason charge against her father, but the thought of the shame that would fall upon her family and the shrine, should her abortion be made known, well..."

"Cause enough for the poor woman to act as she did," I agreed. "And if Serena assisted Marcia in her trouble and Gaius Quintus knew of it, could it mean that Serena had used his services?"

"It must. She was in no position to seek out an abortionist personally, so she had to rely on someone else. Knowing her as I did, she would have done her utmost to ensure that the agent concerned had no knowledge of who was involved. I know she had little regard for her adoptive brother, yet she had few to choose from for such a purpose."

"An empty stomach doesn't scorn ordinary food, as the poet said, lady." That's an expressive phrase by Horace, but he's a little too wordy for my taste. I think 'beggars can't be choosers' is more apt.

"Exactly. I'm sure Serena had Gaius Quintus act for her. But how did he learn that Marcia was involved?"

"When he heard of Marcia's illness. The heralds announced it, lady, I heard them myself. He would have suspected then. Too much of a coincidence, Marcia being treated for an illness right after he'd located an abortionist for his sister. It wouldn't have been difficult for him to confirm that Marcia was the subject of Serena's concern."

We reflected on this silently a moment, then Cornelia said, "Anthus, do you remember? A few days after the shrine murders, a *medicus* and all of his staff were also murdered. A Greek physician, I believe, of good reputation."

"I do remember, lady, and after all you've told me, once again it surely wasn't just coincidence."

"I believe the voices of the physician and his assistants who tended Marcia have been silenced forever," she said. "And now there are no witnesses."

I patted my satchel meaningfully. "None that live, lady."

She nodded. "Yes, but one that speaks clearly from the tomb. And perhaps we have another witness, one who can support part of Marcia's letter at least."

"Lady?"

"The servant, Anthus, the one Marcia mentioned in her letter, who accompanied her to the forum. It won't take long to learn who it is. We'll go inside now. It's growing too warm out here. It must be well into the sixth hour. I'll have lunch brought to us in my office." She waved aside my polite protestation and led us indoors.

While I waited for the Chief Vestal's return, I looked out her window at the stone bench close by the fish pool. In my mind's eye, I saw two small girls sitting side by side, their feet swinging happily. I could hear their childish chatter and giggling.

My introspection was interrupted by Cornelia entering with an intelligent-looking woman about her own age whom she introduced as Echonis. I asked her about the day she'd gone with Marcia.

"I accompanied her, sir. I remember it was a pleasant day, in the mid-afternoon about a month ago. When we were near the speakers rostra, lady Marcia Renata told me I was to leave her and wait in front of the Basilica Julia."

She hesitated. "But I didn't do it, sir. Not right away. The lady behaved very strangely that day, silent and moody, which isn't like her at all. I knew she was upset. She was never able to hide her feelings, lady Marcia, and I've known her since the day she arrived as a *virguncula* priestess."

"What did you do, Echonis, if you didn't go back to the basilica?"

"Well sir, when the lady walked past the rostra she headed toward the front of the temple of Saturn, where the steps are. I was concerned about her, so I went over to the other side of the rostra and looked around the corner. I saw a man walk from the temple of Concord over to where she was standing. After they'd talked a minute or so, they walked off toward the start of the

Capitoline Rise. The lady had told me she wouldn't be gone long so I went back and waited in front of the basilica. I didn't dare follow them, sir, much as I wanted to. Lady Marcia would have been angry at such disobedience."

"Did you get a good look at the man, Echonis? Could you describe him?"

"Oh, sir, there's no need of that. I recognized him right away. It was Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus."

The Chief Vestal and I exchanged glances.

"How did you know him?" Cornelia asked.

"About seven or eight days earlier he'd come to the residence to visit lady Serena Hateria. And again the following day. I was the attendant in the visitors' lounge both times and when he departed each time the lady Serena used his full name when she told me to escort him to the courtyard entrance."

"It is our custom," Cornelia told me, "to have an attendant present when a priestess has a male visitor."

"Did you notice if there was anything unusual about their meetings? Or were they merely having a quiet conversation?"

"I was seated too far away to hear them, sir, but sometimes their voices rose. They were speaking Greek and I have no Greek. But they seemed agitated, as though they were arguing. And the first time that Gaius Quintus left he was in a black mood and completely ignored me when I opened the gateway for him. But the next day he seemed different. Smiled at me and gave me two *sesterces* when he left."

There weren't any other questions I could think of, so I thanked Echonis and, as I'd done for Tropheme, gave her a twenty-five *denarii* gold coin.

"That's fifty *denarii* you've lavished on my staff today," Cornelia said with her knowing not-quite-a-smile. "Oh, yes, I've already heard of your kindness to Tropheme. I take it that Sutorius Macro has allowed you an expense account, has he?"

"Indeed, lady. But he doesn't know it yet. When I tell him he'll tax me with trying to bankrupt the treasury."

"Here's our lunch," she said as a servant brought in a large tray of bread, cheese, olives, dried figs and nuts and a pitcher of wine.

"Tell me, lady, I said later, as she was refilling my wine cup, "if it's the custom of your house than an attendant must be present when a priestess has a male visitor, why isn't there one with us now?"

"Sutorius Anthus, like most people in authority I am scrupulous in enforcing the regulations, but I rarely observe them myself. You must try these figs."

CHAPTER XXII

As I left the House of the Vestals, I noticed people staring intently to the southwest. Following their gaze, I saw a distant pall of dark gray smudging the clear summer sky. Fire! A large one in the thirteenth district, the Aventine, one of the city's seedier locales.

It's only about a three-minute walk from the Vestal residence to Ballista's office in the *aediles'* and heralds' building at the other end of the forum, but I made it in half that time, hoping to find Ballista still there. His precinct is the eighth, centered in the Forum Romanum, but it borders on the thirteenth, where the fire was. I surmised that the eighth's firefighters and police would be dispatched to assist the thirteenth.

I was right. The only man left in the office was the orderly room *cornicularius*, a grizzled, amiable veteran I'd met before.

"Just missed him, Sutorius Anthus," he said, "but he left a message in case you showed up. He's in the Aventine. Bad fire there. Reckon you saw the smoke. He's taken a detachment of our boys to help with crowd control. You know what the bastards are like."

He meant the crowd, not the policemen. Common events, fires attract thugs as rotting meat draws flies. The scum loot the disaster area, often risking their lives in burning buildings.

"Says if you've anything important for him, look for him there or leave a message with me."

"I'll try to find him. If I do, any messages for him?"

"No. He only left two lads with me and they're looking into a brawl in one of the less refined taverns in the Velabrum. And we've locked up a worthy citizen who, taken with the grape, pissed on the Golden Milestone. Just tell him," he grinned, "what a magnificent job I'm doing."

The narrow street leading to the Aventine was jammed with people heading to the fire area. It was only a mile distant, but a half hour passed before I reached the milling throng that was held back by a cordon of the Urban Cohorts. Pushing and squeezing my way through the packed bodies, I got close enough to call out to a nearby policeman.

"Decurion!" I held my satchel aloft when he turned to me. He wasn't a decurion, but a touch of flattery never hurts, does it? He came over to me.

"I have an important message for Caelius Ballista, tribune of the eighth district Cohorts," I said, again holding up the satchel. "Can you direct me to him, decurion?"

An unkempt bearded man pushed out of the crowd and snarled something at the policeman. Sighing in exasperation, he turned from me, fractured the lout's right collarbone with his cudgel and shoved him into the arms of his friends.

"Anyone else?" he roared. No volunteers stepping forth, he returned to me.

"You might find him near the *horrea*, sir. Saw him heading that way half an hour ago."

'Sir' he called me. Amazing what a posh accent and a good leather satchel will do for one. "Thank you, I'll look for him there. What's the best way to go?"

"Down there to the left, sir, past the end of the burning buildings, then turn right." He pointed to the space between the mob contained by the police line and a row of burning *insulae*.

From two hundred feet away, I felt the blast of heat from the blazing tenements. There had been seven of them but two of the middle ones had collapsed into immense heaps of fiery rubble. The fire had probably started in one of them and spread to those on each side. It wouldn't have taken long with only about ten feet between the structures. The remaining tenements were roaring infernos of six floors, spewing burning debris that rose high and then floated down in every direction, some of it on the crowd of ghoulish sightseers.

I was nauseated at the sight of blackened, smoldering bodies lying close to the end tenement, people who'd jumped from the upper levels and were either killed by the fall or too badly injured to crawl away from the searing heat. Why had they still been in their dwellings? Night workers, asleep and forgotten by their neighbors? Terrified children left alone? Or people trying to gather their valuables, thinking they could outpace the racing wall of flame?

There were no *vigiles* in sight. Not that they could have done anything; the heat wouldn't let them anywhere close.

I rounded the last tenement and headed toward the Tiber where the *horrea* were located on its east bank just above the river's bend. There they were, parallel to the river and running in a line about a quarter of a mile. Intended to store goods barged upstream from Rome's seaport, Ostia, twelve miles away, most of their contents were now carted overland from southern ports. Silting of the Tiber's mouth at Ostia prevents the larger merchant ships from docking.

The warehouse complex stood some two hundred feet from the burning tenements and now I could see where the firefighters were, thousands of them. Obviously *vigiles* had been brought in from other city districts.

The conflagration continued to disgorge fiery fragments and an easterly breeze wafted them toward the warehouses. From where I stood at the south end of the complex, I saw three bucket brigades of at least a hundred men each, scooping water from the river and passing it up the bank. Fascinated by their speed, I watched for a minute or two and estimated that between them the three lines were drawing water at a rate of almost a hundred buckets a minute.

One of the bucket lines was emptying into large wooden tubs mounted on low-wheeled flatbeds; these were hauled away rapidly by teams of half a dozen firefighters to the other side of the warehouses. There the water was sloshed against the sides of the buildings and onto the larger bits of burning matter drifting from the sky. The other two lines relayed their buckets up ladders on the river side of the warehouses where dozens of men wetted down the roof surface.

When I moved closer to the river side, I saw that down the entire length of the warehouse row were countless bucket lines from river to rooftop. I understood the reason for such frenzied activity. Apart from such things as cloth, wine, oil, carpets and various exotic imports, the buildings contained the bulk of the city's supply of the most precious of all imports—grain. If one of Rome's main granaries were lost to fire, it would be a disaster beyond belief.

There was little chance of Ballista being on the river side, so I went back to the other side and walked toward the far end of the row, keeping clear of the firefighters. As I neared the end, I was startled by a sudden thunderous 'whoomph.' To my right I saw the second tenement from the end collapsing, falling outward toward the warehouse. And me!

Bolting like a hare along with a dozen firefighters to the end of the warehouse line, I looked back at the scene. The blazing remains of the toppled building reached almost half-way toward the storage buildings, but the impact had flung shards of smoking masonry and burning beams to the base of their walls. Already a swarm of firefighters was pulling fiery pieces away with long, hooked metal poles and dousing them with water from the mobile tubs.

"Anthus!" roared a cheery voice, one I knew at once. I turned around and there were Macro and Ballista a few paces away. I hadn't noticed them during my sprint to safety, having other matters on my mind.

"Come to do a little looting, have you?" Macro asked. "Not that you'll have much luck, eh?"

I wasn't surprised to see him, nor to find him in an excellent mood. He'd much rather be at the scene of a fire or crime than warming an office chair.

"Actually, I was looking for you, sir," I told Ballista. "Your orderly room adjutant directed

me here. I found something in the Vestals' residence I believe both of you should see at once."

Taking Marcia's letter from the satchel, I handed it to Macro. He read it and passed it to Ballista." *Vah!*" cried Macro. "We've got the bastard!"

Ballista read it, then said more cautiously, "Certainly enough to arrest him."

"Which we'll damn well do before the day is over. And I'll be there when it happens," Macro said. "So it'll just have to wait. I'm staying here until this mess is under control, another three or four hours at least. Once the rest of the buildings collapse, the fire watch should be able to handle it. Unless the damn wind comes up."

"How many firefighters will be on duty overnight?" Ballista asked.

"I've directed each district to assign fifty men for the night hours and the same number to relieve them at daybreak. That ought to do it. They'll keep damping the warehouses until the fire's no longer a threat, then they'll work on the fire itself. We'll have to keep chucking buckets of water on it for a few days and squirt it with the damn pumps. Pumps! Damn useless things. Might as well have the men piss on the fire for all the good they do. What you'd expect from a damn Greek invention, eh?"

"I thought they were an Egyptian device," Ballista said.

Macro snorted. "Scratch an Egyptian and you'll find a damn Greek with a suntan."

Having got that off his chest, he turned to me. "Go back with Ballista to his office and write an order from me to the tribunes of each district telling them to assign a *decurion* and ten men to report here at the start of the first night hour. We'll need 'em to patrol the warehouses because the thugs will be itching to have a go at them later tonight, passing themselves off as *vigiles* or whatever. Make three copies of the order, Anthus. And don't be flowery, dammit. It's an order and not an invitation. Short and sweet.

"Ballista, while he's writing the order, commandeer three public couriers from the *aediles'* office. Sign the orders for me and dispatch them with the couriers to each district headquarters. If a tribune isn't immediately available, the senior man present is to sign the order and will be held responsible for taking action. And," Macro added, "if any pretentious bastard in the *aediles'* office wishes to quibble about the couriers, be he clerk or bloody magistrate, just tell him Sutorius Macro will have his private parts nailed to the senate house door before nightfall."

A fourth tenement now slowly crumpled in on itself, throwing a mountain of flaming detritus skyward.

"It won't be long before the others go," Macro said. "Now, as for this Gaius fellow, we'll meet in your office at the start of the third night hour, Ballista. Have a detachment of four men there. Then we'll pay a visit to..."

He paused and stared at me. "You do have his address, I trust."

"I do, sir. It's in the ninth district."

"Good! We'll call on Gaius whatshisname and give him free lodging for the night followed by a pleasant chat in the morning, eh?"

"If he's not home and nobody knows his whereabouts, we can leave a couple of men in his rooms to greet him when returns," Ballista suggested.

"Let's hope the bastard isn't spending the night in some whore's bed," said Macro. "Now, both of you be off. Anthus, tell my wife I'll be home in a few hours. Maybe. And tell Cato I want a hot meal as soon as I arrive."

"Cerdo. I'll tell him, sir." Cerdo is our chef. Macro forgets his name because he's only been a member of the household staff for fourteen years.

CHAPTER XXIII

A rising breeze had threatened the warehouses and delayed Macro, but he was still in good spirits after bathing and dining. So it was more than hour hours after sunset before we arrived at Ballista's headquarters.

Seven of us—Macro, Ballista, four of the Urban Cohort men and myself—trudged through the moonless night up the Street of the Silversmiths and onto the Flaminian Way from which we would turn left just past the *saepta*, the huge voting enclosure, into the Street of the Weavers. As we passed Corax's tavern, the lamps were burning and the sound of drunken merriment could be heard through the open windows. I remembered Gaius Quintus in the tavern, reveling in the center of attention as he bought drinks for his admirers.

"Where'd you get his address?" Macro asked as we turned into the Street of the Weavers.
"The *aedile's* registry?"

"The Chief Vestal gave it to me, sir. Our man had called on her before the funerals to assure her of his unwavering respect and so forth and to declare his inconsolable grief at the loss of his sister. The lady Cornelia took all that *cum grano salis*. Anyway, he gave her his address should his devoted service be required by her."

A decurion carrying a *lanterna* led the way. He stopped and said to Ballista, "This should be the place, sir. I'll check the sign."

We were before a three-story building that abutted the narrow sidewalk. Four stone steps led up to the door that was set back in its entrance niche about five feet from the sidewalk. At the top of the steps the decurion raised his lantern to the sign above the door and returned to us. "The apartments of Spurius Felix, sir," he confirmed.

At a nod from Macro, the decurion returned to the door, followed by Ballista, and clacked loudly with the bronze doorknocker. He waited a moment and rapped again, louder and longer. From the sidewalk we heard the door being unlocked, then it opened a crack.

"What do y'want?"

"Police," the decurion said. "Open the door."

When the door stood wide, the lantern revealed a grubby middle-aged wretch wiping the sleep from his eyes. "The door's open. What's bloody well going on?"

"First of all, identify yourself," said Ballista.

"Well now, I ain't Spurius Felix the landlord, am I?"

Ballista stared coolly at him a moment. "In which case I take it you're the night janitor."

"Maybe I am, maybe I ain't."

The decurion, a tall beefy specimen, handed his lantern to Ballista. "If you will, sir, for a moment." He seized the wretch by the upper arms, hoisted him into the air and slammed him against the stucco wall at the side of the entrance. His victim's feet dangled a foot above the step.

"Now hear this, you miserable stinking *merda*, when a tribune of the Urban Cohorts asks you a question, you will keep a civil tongue in your disgusting lice-ridden head and answer him properly."

He bounced the wretch's skull three times off the wall as he asked, "Do...you...under... stand?"

The wretch blubbered something in the affirmative.

"Good, good," the decurion approved. "However, in the event you forget your manners again, I'll rip off one of your arms at the shoulder and club you to death with the wet end." He

released the wretch who dropped to the step on his knees, whimpering.

"And stand up when an officer is addressing you!" the decurion barked, taking his lantern back from Ballista.

"Well, then, are you the night doorman or not?" Ballista said.

"Yes," the wretch quavered.

"Sir!" roared the decurion.

"Sir! Yessir, I am. Sir."

"You know all the tenants of this building?"

"Yessir, yes, I do."

"Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus?"

"I know him, sir. Hasn't lived here long, maybe a week, sir."

"Is he here right now?" Ballista asked.

"No sir. No, he went out about the start of the first hour. I'd just come on duty and he had me get a litter for him. Sir."

"Did you hear the address he gave to the litter bearers?"

The wretch scratched his head. "Well, I did, sir, but I ain't certain. He said the Palatine, I remember that. And I maybe got the name wrong, but it was something like Flavius Tubero. Sir."

The decurion grinned. "Probably Aulus Fulvius Tubero, sir. I was with the tenth district before I was transferred to your command. I know the Palatine backwards. Tubero, a mincing little dandy, lives on Peacock Rise."

We bade farewell to the night janitor of the apartments of Spurius Felix in the Street of the Weavers, leaving him a wiser man. I had made some notes to record Ballista's inquiries but saw no need to include the decurion's contribution.

We retraced our path back to the forum, that being the most direct route to the Palatine which lies just south of it. For the second time that night we passed Corax's tavern where the late-night drinkers still worshipped at the temple of Liber. Or Bacchus, as the Greeks call him.

Macro hadn't said much during the evening's events, but I think he was enjoying leaving the routine work to his subordinates. I heard him grunt with approval at the decurion's explanation to the doorkeeper of the way things were.

We were ascending the northern rise of the Palatine hill not far past the palace of Tiberius Caesar when the decurion announced, "Fulvius Tubero lives here. An establishment not unknown to the local detachment. His parents live in a country villa but that wasn't exciting enough for their pride and joy, so *tata* bought him this place."

"You seem well-informed, decurion," Macro said.

"As I said earlier, prefect, I worked this patch for a few years. High class neighborhood like this, you get to know who's who."

The two-story house was set back about thirty feet from the street. The yellow pool of light from the lantern revealed a flagstone paved forecourt and to either side a shoulder high stone wall separated it from the adjoining yards.

Ballista sent the three policemen to the rear and sides of the house to prevent anyone leaving through doors or windows. Moments later the knocker clunked loudly in the quiet night. The door was opened almost at once by a pretty girl holding a large table lamp.

"Hello." She smiled. "I'm afraid you're too late for the party." Her dark hair was a cap of tight curls above large, black-rimmed eyes with blue painted lids, rouged cheeks, and scarlet lips. But she wore a man's tunic.

"Police," stated the decurion. "This is the house of Aulus Fulvius Tubero?"

"Police!" she squealed. "How exciting! Oh, yes, this is his house, but he's in bed, you know. It's late. *Do* come back in the morning."

As she began to close the door, the decurion rammed it wide open and, still holding his lantern in one hand, seized the painted creature by the neck with the other.

"Your name!"

"She stared at him in goggle-eyed terror. "Demetrius."

"Demetrius, hell! That's a man's name!"

"I *am* a man," Demetrius wailed. "Oh, please don't hurt me."

"Status!"

"House slave. I'm a personal attendant to Aulus."

Releasing the unhappy Demetrius, the decurion took the lamp from his trembling hand. "The tribune has some questions. Answer them."

"Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus came here earlier tonight," Ballista said. "Is he still here?"

"I don't know. There were nine or ten guests here tonight. Some have departed."

The decurion stepped toward him.

"But I think he's still here, sir."

"Take us to him," Ballista ordered.

"Oh, sir, I'll bring him to you here. My master will be dreadfully upset if..." The slave sobbed, face blotched with black rivulets from his eyeliner. He squeaked in terror as the decurion stepped toward him again.

"I'll take you."

The decurion handed the lamp back to the snuffling Demetrius who led us through the small *atrium* into a hallway. An open door to the right revealed the dining room where, by the light of several lamps, we saw two men stretched out on *triclinium* couches, naked and snoring.

A flight of stairs at the end of the hall took us to the second floor, where Demetrius stopped before a closed door and pointed at it wordlessly.

At a nod from Ballista, the decurion flung the door open and stood aside. Macro and Ballista stepped into the room, which was illuminated by several lamps and smelled of sweet incense. The two naked men on the bed ceased their entwined writhing and gaped stupidly at their unexpected callers.

One pulled himself free of the other and sprang from the bed, seizing a towel which he flung around his hips.

"How dare you enter my house!" he spluttered. "I am Aulus Ful..."

"Shut up, sonny!" Macro interrupted. "We know who you are. And what you are."

The one cowering on the bed cringed as Ballista approached him. "I am Caelius Ballista, tribune of the Urban Cohorts, eighth district." He turned to me. "Sutorius Anthus, can you identify this man?"

"He is Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus, sir.

"I arrest you, Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus," Ballista said, "for the murders of Serena Hateria, priestess of the shrine of Vesta and of Minicia, public slave of the shrine of Vesta."

Fulvius Tubero stared wide-eyed at Ballista, then rumpled to the floor in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XXIV

Relayed by beacon semaphore down the line of signal stations linking Rome with Surrentum, the brief message reached Tiberius Caesar's island retreat at daybreak. It informed him that full details of an arrest in the Vestal murders were en route to him. Shortly after noon in the seventh hour the station on the promontory of Minerva signaled that a courier had embarked for Capreae.

By mid-afternoon Tiberius had read the letter from Macro and a copy of the dead Vestal's letter. Slumping at his desk in the library, the documents spread before him, he gazed vacantly out the window at a lone fishing boat in the distance. "Damn me, Macro, sometimes I wish you weren't so damned efficient."

Why couldn't he have just picked up a known thug or two, procured a few reliable witnesses and, after a fair trial, give 'em a memorable send-off in the arena, he thought. Still, what's done is done. And I can't really complain about him finding the actual murderer, can I? But why did it have to be this damned Haterius Florianus fellow? Can't say I remember ever meeting him, but I knew his adoptive father well enough. Greatest orator of his time, everyone said. Well, could be, but to me he was nothing but an obsequious old bore. And a bosom friend of my mother and Augustus. Yes, got himself a consulship out of that, didn't he? Maybe I'm being unfair. Old Haterius, what was he...ninety when he died? He was loyal to Augustus during the civil war. Served at Actium, I believe. Or wherever. And his daughter I remember, Serena. Met her several times in the shrine and other places doing my *pontifex maximus* act. A decent woman, proud patrician and all that. We could use a few more of her stamp. Murdered by her own brother! One of my priestesses knifed by a member of her own patrician family! No, it simply won't do. She was under my *potestas*. I'm obliged to see her murderer punished.

Tiberius shifted in his chair, picked up Macro's letter, then laid it down again. I was wrong, he thought. Wishing Macro wasn't so efficient. I must be getting dotty in my old age to have such a thought. Damn me, I *am* getting ancient. That's no excuse. I'm Tiberius Caesar, lord of this, holder of that, and so on and so forth. Damned nonsense most of it, but I have to play the role of First Citizen and *pontifex maximus*, like it or not. Oh, Tiberius, cease your damned meandering. Soon it'll be night, so let's get down to business.

He read the letters once more, then ordered the slave posted in the hall outside the library door to have his personal secretary attend him at once with his writing materials.

An hour later he finished dictating. "Two copies of this, Ilus, one each for Aelius Sejanus and Sutorius Macro. Do your usual literary embellishments but nothing too damned fancy. It's an official document, so do it in Latin."

At dawn the following morning the courier left Capreae for Rome bearing Tiberius Caesar's message to the prefects.

CHAPTER XXV

Barely forty-eight hours had passed since we'd interrupted Gaius Quintus' dalliance with his boy friend when a courier from Capreae arrived late at night at the Macro residence.

The night watchman woke me saying the *dominus* wanted me at once in his office chamber. Minutes later, when I entered, Macro was reading at his desk. "Letter from Caesar," he said. "The same one has been delivered to Sejanus. Read it, then we'll talk."

Caesar's missive was written on sheets of papyrus, not on a scroll. Macro pushed the sheets he'd already read toward me and gestured me to sit. I sat and read.

Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Nero, pontifex maximus, holder of the tribunician power, to L. Aelius Sejanus, Praetorian Prefect and Q. Sutorius Macro, Prefect of the Vigiles and Urban Cohorts, greeting.

I am pleased with the news of the arrest of Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus. It is my wish that he be brought to trial as soon as possible. Your letter refers to matters in the case which require judicious thought and after careful consideration I make these suggestions.

I understand your concern over the revelations in the letter written by the priestess Marcia Renata. On the one hand it is the chief evidence supporting the charges against Florianus. On the other, in the eyes of many it may compromise trust in the security of the will depository of the shrine of Vesta. My answer to that is simple. Let such people deposit their wills elsewhere. The custody of wills by the Vestal Virgins is not a religious commitment but only one of long-standing custom. When the priestess Marcia Renata compromised her position, she betrayed the trust placed in her, but she did not break a religious vow. In that respect I shall soon be meeting with the Chief Vestal at the investiture of the two novices. I shall discuss with her the matter of enhancing the security of the will depository.

The other aspect of the letter is that its disclosure will bring humiliation to her parents, if not the entire clan Renatus. I regret this personally because the Renati have served Rome well for many years.

Although exposure of the letter will create some distress and no doubt provide food for the troughs of light-minded scandal mongers, it is my opinion that it must be produced in evidence. A skillful prosecutor should be capable of stressing the civil nature of the breach of trust by Marcia Renata in contrast to any religious dereliction and of emphasizing that the act was done out of fear inspired by a corrupt man of unsavory reputation. Let it be known I shall be most displeased to learn if her family is maligned in this business.

As for the trial of Haterius Florianus, let it be conducted under the normal jurisdiction of the Urban Praetor. I suggest a jury of one hundred and five men: thirty-five each from the patrician class and equestrian order and one each from the four urban and thirty-one rural tribes. Should any jurist quibble that this is unusual, then let him be reminded this is an unusual case which concerns not only unlawful coercion, fraud, and a double murder but also sacrilege against the hearth of Rome. The crime was a threat to the welfare of the entire populace, and it is fitting that it be judged by representatives of all social orders. This is my will in the matter, so let my will stand as reason enough.

As for the legal proceeding, I dare say you'll have a swarm of advocates vying for the glory of prosecuting. Choose wisely in consultation with the leading jurists. But who will wish to act as patronus to the accused? What lawyer of stature will defend a case he sees as hopeless? Although there is precedent for the accused to represent himself, I do not wish it so. He must be

seen to have proper counsel in court. If an established advocate is not willing to act, you might suggest to the jurists that they should encourage a younger man whose star is rising and whose public exposure in a trial of such prominence cannot help but enhance his reputation. In that regard, you might remind whoever is chosen as defense advocate of the words of Tullius Cicero, that the greatest renown and the profoundest gratitude are won by speeches which defend people. And remind him also that Cicero didn't win all his cases.

As for the convention that a man condemned to capital punishment be permitted to seek self-exile between the dates of sentencing and execution, I forbid it in this instance. The accused has committed sacrilege against an Olympian goddess by murdering her priestess before her very altar and by murdering a servant of her shrine within its precinct. He has offended the pantheon of Olympian deities and placed the people of Rome in jeopardy. He is to remain under close arrest and in chains to the hour of his execution.

Caesar's letter went on for a few more pages, dealing with administrative matters which were of no interest to me. I squared the pages neatly and put them on the desk between Macro and me.

"What's your opinion of all that, then?" he asked.

"Well, sir, Caesar has a forthright approach. And I must say I agree with his suggestions, although they seem to be directives."

"Yes," Macro chuckled, "that's what they are. And now we know his thinking, we can get on with it."

"He appears to take it for granted the accused is guilty."

"Remember, m'boy, Tiberius is an old soldier, eh? He's still got the old legion court-martial attitude. The judges assemble for the trial and say, 'March the guilty bastard in.' And in this case the bastard *is* guilty. Got to be."

He paused and gestured at Caesar's letter.

"I doubt, Anthus, that Caesar would look too kindly on my sharing his thoughts with my household steward. So, you've never seen this letter, have you?"

"What letter, sir?"

He grunted approvingly. "The reason I've let you read it is that you've been in on this matter from the start. Done most of the work. But you're not through yet."

I knew what he meant. "A witness at the trial, sir?"

"A witness in two respects. As the scribe who made the notes during the investigation and as the person who found the priestess's letter."

"I shall do my best, sir." I saw myself in snowy toga, delivering testimony in stentorian tones such that the judges arise as one man, applauding.

"I'm sure you will, but just remember that the defending advocate is allowed to question you. And that is what you must prepare for. Whoever he is, he'll be out to prove to the world what a courtroom star he is, blinding us with oratory. He'll half-convince us the murderer was the Prefect of Egypt, if not the Chief Vestal herself, and that his client Haterius whatusname is a gentle philosopher who weeps at the sight of a dead thrush."

I thought about it a moment. "*Testis unus, testis nullus.* What if the defender stresses the legal dictum of 'one witness, no witness'? In that case I'll need support by others.

"No problem there. The prosecutor will have Ballista and myself to call upon if he wants backing for your testimony. And the Chief Vestal. She'll no doubt be called upon anyway, being the one who found the bodies. She'll handle herself capably." He grinned. "I almost hope the defending man tries to intimidate her. It'd be quite a diversion watching him being shredded by

the cut of her razor mind."

"The way I see it, there won't be many witnesses, sir. Unless the accused produces a flock to swear to his excellent character and that he was a hundred miles away at the time of the murders."

"Which he may do, but any good advocate can put the lie to that kind of drivel. As for the prosecution, the evidence is circumstantial, although convincingly so. Apart from those of us who attended the crime scene, the only witnesses I can think of are the two slave women."

Slave women? Ah, he must mean the servant who accompanied Marcia Renata the day she met with Gaius Quintus. I pictured the pleasant middle-aged woman, Echonis. But which other slave was involved? I was suddenly hit with the realization they'd be tortured before their testimony would be accepted because they are slaves. The learned men of law know that slaves are irresponsible liars whose testimony must be extracted under torture to ensure they're telling the truth.

"You refer to Echonis, the shrine servant who identified the accused as the man who met Marcia Renata in the forum?"

"That's the one."

"You mention two slaves. Who is the other?"

"Damned if I know her name. The one who was making the night rounds at the time of the murder."

"Turia is her name. But, sir, she saw nothing. She only noted that the lady Serena and the night *janitrix* were missing and reported it to the lady Marcia. That's what she told the Chief Vestal."

"But she was on duty that night and may have seen something she hasn't divulged yet," Macro explained patiently. "Probably both prosecution and defense will want her as a witness."

"If they testify, sir, will they have to be subjected to judicial torture because they're slaves?"

"Of course," said Macro. "Dammit, Anthus, they have to be tortured. It's the law."

"My understanding is that it isn't a law, sir, but a custom of such long practice that it's taken for granted. A citizen may be tortured but a slave *must* be."

"Just what are you blethering on about?" Macro glared.

"I don't like to think of loyal servants suffering mutilation and torment at the hands of a *carnifex* just to satisfy an ancient convention. They'll be honest with the court without such unnecessary persuasion. And Echonis has already told what she saw when she could have said nothing."

Macro looked upon me with forbearance. "Really, Anthus m'boy, I sometimes wonder about you. A clever, capable fellow like you, fussing over the simple matter of torturing a slave. Damn me, how do we know they'll tell the truth unless they're tortured first, eh? No, it'll have to be done if the prosecutor wants their testimony. And now it's time we got some sleep."

Macro wonders about me? For all his good points, my master's lack of social conscience in some respects worries me. He shows consideration toward his own slaves and treats the young slave, Rufinus, like a son almost, pampering him, sending him to a good school. Yet he can dismiss the thought of innocent women in the interrogation chamber with indifference. It is I who worry about him!

I must pay a call upon the lady Cornelia in the next day or so.

CHAPTER XXVI

Quintus Vibius Crispus looked through the narrow slot in the cell door, then turned to the centurion.

"Oh no, no. I'm afraid this won't do at all," he said. "I simply can't work in such wretched confinement. Please find me a decent chamber with a good-sized table and two chairs."

The Praetorian centurion stared back at Crispus, his blank face barely concealing his contempt. Just who does this little bastard think he is? Bloody eighteen, nineteen-year-old kid giving me orders! Does he think I'm bloody impressed by the bloody knight's stripe on his bloody tunic?

"Sir," he said, "I was told to bring you to the prisoner. Nothing more. There was no mention of anything else. I've brought you and will let you into his cell if you wish. If not, then I have other duties to attend to."

"Oh, dear," Crispus murmured. "How very inconvenient this is. Indeed...but there it is...yes. Well, in that case, I'll be off."

The young man walked away, then after a few steps turned back to the centurion. "Oh yes. Please be so kind as to inform the Praetorian Prefect he'll have to find another advocate for the prisoner. Thank you."

Confused, the centurion strode after the departing youth. "What has the prefect to do with all this?"

Crispus stared at him. "You don't know? Well, you saw my written authorization only a few minutes ago. That is the letter signed by the Urban Praetor advising that I was appointed defense advocate to the prisoner."

"Uh, yessir."

"In which he directed all concerned, which of course would include you, centurion, to offer me full cooperation. But perhaps you didn't bother to read that part, busy man like yourself. Well, you see, the praetor was one of a committee of five who appointed me." He paused. "And, centurion, that committee was head by Lucius Aelius Sejanus, Praetorian Prefect."

"Sir, I didn't know! I'll look to getting you a chamber right away."

"How extremely kind of you, centurion. Yes. And 'right away' is not to exceed fifteen minutes. Please ensure the chairs are comfortable. And while you're at it, please provide a pitcher of wine and two cups. Decent wine, not whatever dismal vintage you probably sell in the camp canteen."

"Sir."

"And another thing. How long has the prisoner been in your custody?"

"Um, well, this is his sixth day, sir."

"When I observed him in his cell his appearance suggested that during those six days he hasn't been shaved, bathed or given a clean tunic. Well?"

"I guess not, sir."

"You *guess!* What do you mean, *guess!* Has he or has he not?" Crispus snapped, abandoning his gentle manner of speech.

"No, sir."

"By whose orders?"

"Nobody gave me any orders, sir," the centurion replied uneasily.

"Ah," Crispus sighed as though a great truth had just been revealed. "Then the decision was

yours, observing that you're in charge of the detention area. You've chosen to treat the prisoner as a condemned criminal before he's even been tried. Yes, I must make a note of this, indeed. In the meantime, provide me with a chamber where I can conduct my official duties and in one hour bring the prisoner to me, shaved, bathed, and in fresh clothing."

"Yessir. One hour," the centurion said. "Please come and wait in my office, sir." As he led the young man away, he prayed silently, "O Mars, great god of war, please don't let the Praetorian Prefect learn of this!"



At the knock on the door, Crispus looked up from the document he'd been reading at the large table. "Enter!" He stood up as the centurion entered with the prisoner. Crispus saw two guardsmen in the hall opposite the doorway.

"The prisoner, sir. Two of my men will be outside the door. Please let them know when you're through." He saluted and departed, closing the door gently.

Crispus smiled at the other man. "You are Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus?"

"I am," Gaius Quintus responded cautiously.

"And I am Quintus Vibius Crispus. We've never met, and I dare say you've never heard of me. I have been appointed your *advocatus*. I'll be pleading your case in your forthcoming trial."

Gaius Quintus gaped. "You? But you...you're so young! I was told an advocate would be given me...but I...I thought it would be someone of experience!"

"Let's be seated. May as well be comfortable, eh? Now then, Florianus...oh, how do you wish to be addressed? I prefer my *cognomen*, Crispus, by the way."

"Gaius Quintus is what I'm usually called."

"Very well, Gaius Quintus, let me lay the facts before you at the outset. Yes, I'm young. Nineteen going on twenty. At your age, thirty-four, you consider me just a boy."

"How do you know my age?"

"I know a lot about you, as you will learn. But let me continue. Have you ever read the *Res Gestae* of Augustus Caesar, the record of his enterprises? No? Then let me quote its opening lines. 'When I was nineteen, I raised an army on my own account and at my own expense, by the help of which I restored the republic to liberty, which had been enslaved by the tyranny of a faction.' When he was nineteen, you will note."

Gaius Quintus stared at him sullenly.

"You appear unimpressed with the accomplishment of the divine Augustus when he was just a boy, even though when he'd achieved your present age, he was virtually master of the world. So I, hardly to be compared with Augustus, must impress you far less. Well, so be it."

Crispus poured wine into the two ceramic cups and placed one before each of them. "We'll have a measure of wine together at least, before they return you to your cell."

He raised his cup to Gaius Quintus. "I wish you well in your defense. Before I go, I'll leave the names of a few treatises on the law you'd do well to study before you plan your strategy."

Gaius Quintus set his cup on the table with trembling hand. "But I can't defend myself! I know nothing of the law. I was told I'd have an advocate provided."

"Ah, yes. You did have, namely me. However, you obviously don't want me, so you'll have to act for yourself. And, if I may repeat the old saying, he who represents himself in court has a fool for an advocate."

"There are other advocates," Gaius Quintus said hesitantly.

"There are indeed! Perhaps a hundred or more here in the city and that many again within a few day's travel. But you have a problem. None of them will act for you. They'd much prefer to be on the prosecution side. In fact, I'd give anything to be prosecuting you myself."

His sullen face now reflecting despair, Gaius Quintus quavered, "You want to prosecute me, yet you've been assigned to act as defense counsel? How can you..."

"Yes, yes. You wonder how I can act for you when I'd prefer to act against you. Understandable, I suppose. Very well, the reason I'd be happier prosecuting is because the case against you is strong, circumstantial as it may be. The prosecution most certainly has the better position, and the defense will be an uphill battle. An advocate always wishes to be on the winning side, of course. How else can he gain a favorable reputation?"

"You tell me the prosecution has the best chance of winning and yet you seem willing to face defeat. It just doesn't make sense. How could you possibly put your best effort into my defense, thinking the way you do?"

"Oh, you'd get my best effort," Crispus assured him happily. "Why? I'll tell you. Your trial, Gaius Quintus, will be sensational! It's already the talk of the whole city. Here we have a man, of a patrician family, no less, charged with the murder of a Vestal Virgin and a shrine servant, both within the sacred precinct of the shrine! Double sacrilege! And the priestess was his own sister!"

"I didn't murder them, I didn't," Gaius Quintus whispered.

"We'll talk about that later. So, that's the scene. Probably the most spectacular trial since Cicero prosecuted Sergius Catilina."

Elbows on the table, he learned toward the other man. "By all the gods, I assure you, Gaius Quintus, that should you decide to accept me as your advocate, I will defend you with zeal and power such that after the trial is over, the citizens of Rome will remember the name of Quintus Vibius Crispus after they've long forgotten the name of the prosecutor."

Now Crispus leaned back and sipped his wine. "So that's why I'm willing, no, *eager* to defend you. Win or lose, it's a golden opportunity to enhance my reputation. I dare say the betting has already begun, favoring the prosecution. But if I should lose, I'll tell you this. There won't be a thinking man in Rome who doesn't search his heart and wonder if perhaps he's witnessed a travesty of justice! Oh yes, Gaius Quintus, your trial will increase my stature. So you may say, therefore, that I act for selfish reasons to benefit myself. True. But remember this. You also are the beneficiary. My self-glorification can only be achieved through exerting my total resources of legal knowledge and rhetoric in your defense."

He refilled his wine cup, then looked questioningly at the subdued Gaius Quintus. "Oh, by the way, in the past year I've acted four times in court. Twice for the prosecution, twice for the defense. I won 'am all. And now, do you wish me to act for you or not?

"Yes," was the quiet answer. "Please."

"Now that we've settled that, let's get down to business. Normally, you'd be allowed ten days to prepare your defense after procuring an advocate. But you're in luck because six days from now the *ludi Romani* will commence and, as you well know, it'll go on for sixteen days. During that time there will be no trials held. It seems," Crispus said wryly, "that Jupiter Best and Greatest and his female relatives would be offended should we mortals proceed with our day-to-day affairs while the games in their honor are underway. So, what does that tell you, eh?"

Gaius Quintus looked uncertain "We have longer to prepare our case. Twenty-two days or so?"

"Exactly! And I intend to ask the praetor to extend it even further. Protest that my progress was greatly impeded by the games, the people I wanted to interview and consult preferring to

gawk at gladiators and charioteers rather than cooperate with the administration of justice. And so forth. Yes, I'll also have a chat with the prosecutor. From what I've heard, he'd probably appreciate a little more time. He's quite fond of the races and he'd be able to watch the nags with a freer conscience if he knew he had time after the games are finished."

"Who is the prosecutor?"

"Gaius Cassius Longinus. One of the best. He's a descendant of the Cassius who was a ringleader in Julius Caesar's assassination. He's been trying to offset that stigma all his life by showing everybody what a splendid fellow he is. Word has it he's almost a certainty to be elected consul next year. He'll have an imposing array of renowned advocates on his team, you can bet on that. So it'll be lonely me against five or six legal giants."

He grinned at Gaius Quintus. "That doesn't worry me at all. In fact, it could be an advantage. Imagine the judges thinking, hey, just look at that little guy standing up to that impressive line-up and dishing it out to them!"

"I wish I could be as optimistic as you. From what you say it seems the elite of Rome is after my blood. They have a scapegoat and won't let go."

"From your position it's difficult to be confident," Crispus agreed. "However, I'm going to be quite busy the next three or four days, ferreting about the city. During that time, I want you to concentrate on your case every waking hour. What did you say to the priestess Marcia Renata that she could have misconstrued? What was the cause of your falling out with your adoptive family? What is the background of your stretch of bad luck in various enterprises? Think! Think! Then think some more. I want every detail, however insignificant it may seem to you. When I return, I want you to relate your story from the cradle to the present. Do you understand?"

"I'll do my best, Crispus."

"Do that. I'm leaving now, but one more thing before I go. You stated earlier you didn't commit the murders. Well, Gaius Quintus, to be honest, I don't care a fig whether you're guilty or not!"

He looked at the confused expression on the face of Gaius Quintus. "Yes, that mystifies you, does it? Then just remember this. The prosecution is accusing you of a crime and it's their task to convince the judges they have proven your guilt in the specific offences you're charged with. On the other hand, it's my task to convince them that the prosecution has failed to prove your guilt, not to prove that you are innocent. Those are two different things even though they be two sides of the same coin!"

Crispus drained his wine, then arose. "In the words of the late Tullius Cicero, I intend to throw a lot of dust in the face of the prosecutor."

CHAPTER XXVII

"The ceremony went quite well, I thought.

"Quite well, Caesar...considering," the Chief Vestal said.

"Considering? What do you mean, Cornelia?"

"Considering how tired the novices were from the journey. Two days in a jolting wagon on the wretched road from Rome to Puteoli is hardly a pleasure. I've experienced a lot of rough travel in my time, but nothing like that road. The young girls were physically ill from the motion. They'll be dreading the return journey, just as I am!"

The investiture of the two *virguncula* priestesses had taken place earlier that morning and Tiberius and the Chief Vestal sat in the garden of the emperor's villa in Puteoli, the small seaport a few miles west of Neapolis.

"I'm surprised at what you say! I've traveled that road found it comfortable. The grain carts use it. About half the grain shipped from Sicily and Egypt is off-loaded here."

"Of course, you found it comfortable, Caesar!" she said in exasperation. "Doesn't it occur to you that the contractors concerned would see to repairs immediately they learned that Caesar himself would be traveling the route? As for the grain carts, I dare say the road is given some rudimentary attention before the ships arrive, but after a thousand carts heavy with grain have used it, it's allowed to deteriorate until the next fleet is due."

"I've never heard this from anyone else! You're exaggerating, Cornelia."

"I do not exaggerate!" she replied. "Listen to me, Caesar, and listen well. And remember who I am, a descendant of a noble family that has served Rome as consuls, generals, governors, magistrates, and priests just as long as your own has. And I'm the head of one of your religious colleges, a full-time, long serving head, not some socially ambitious appointee such as most of your priests are. No, don't interrupt me! It's true and you know it. But I speak to you now as a citizen to the First Citizen, not as a priestess to the *pontifex maximus*."

Tiberius looked at her warily. "Something is chafing you, Cornelia. And it's more than just the condition of the damn road between here and Rome, I suspect. Very well, I'm listening."

"It is more than the road, Caesar, but I'll start there. Bear in mind that in my position I'm expected to attend social gatherings, too many of them, where I'm privy to the endless chatter of Rome's elite. I learn much. Now, as for your roads. The magistrates responsible designate two or three contractors to maintain a certain road. These contractors are paid by the public treasury. And then the magistrates receive a generous *donatio* from the contractors. The *donatio* of course is the contractor's public-spirited token of admiration of the magistrate's selfless undertaking to repair the roof of whatever god's temple or the fountain in whatever public square out of his own purse."

"Really, Cornelia..."

"You said you'd listen, Caesar! To continue, the contractor then sub-contracts to perhaps ten or twelve others who then offer appropriate tokens of their esteem to the primary contractor. And so on down the line. It's called the 'kick-back' and I'm sure you've heard of it. So, now we have, say, a hundred miles of road allocated to so many sub-contractors that each has only a few miles to look after. And after these last men in the chain have paid their 'kick-back,' the small profit left to them doesn't inspire them to be ardent about road repairs."

"Damn me, Cornelia! That's blunt talk...you're telling me there's corruption in the administration!"

"Call it what you will, Caesar. I'm not one of your ostentatious senators or magistrates telling you in bombastic language what they want you to hear. I'm too pressed, especially in recent weeks, to mince words! And furthermore, perhaps it's time an audit was made of the grain supply..."

"The grain supply! Are you suggesting that Gaius Turranus is guilty of..."

"No," she broke in. "Old as he is, I'm sure your Prefect of the Grain Supply is doing a capable and honest job. I refer to what happens before he becomes involved. I wonder if your advisors ever ponder why grain is at such a high price when the crops in Sicily and Egypt have been bountiful the last few years. Then I wonder if it's because so many of your senators and knights have heavy investments with the grain brokers."

"This is appalling! What proof have you?"

She looked at him coldly. "*Verbera, sed audi*, Caesar," she said, raising her voice for the first time. "*Chastise me, but listen to what I have to say!* I have no proof. But were I one of your government officials, I'd find it soon enough. Just look around you! The evidence is there—bad roads, outrageously priced grain, a water supply frequently interrupted, no doubt because of badly maintained aqueducts. Why is it that Roman roads are renowned throughout the empire, yet the ones in Italia are a disgrace? It's because the provincial roads are built and maintained by the professional engineers of your legions, Caesar. But throughout Italia, who have we looking after them? I'll tell you. Any cowherder who can afford a 'kick-back,' whether he knows the difference between a bucket of sand and a flagstone or not!"

Rising, Tiberius glared, then paced to and fro for a moment or two. "Dammit, Cornelia, there's only one other person who talks to me like that and gets away with it—my sister-in-law Antonia!"

"Antonia," said Cornelia, her voice softening. "She and I have been friends for many years. Her loyalty to you far exceeds that of all your senators and magistrates rolled into one."

He sat beside her. "I know," he said, "and I know also that you and she are cut from the same cloth. I'm concerned about what you've just told me, Cornelia, and I'm going to give it much thought. Forgive me for snarling at you. You're not one to indulge in gossip and I appreciate your candor."

"And I, Caesar, have given you unsolicited advice on matters you no doubt consider outside a woman's domain. My excuse is that I'm tired and my temper is short. The last few weeks have fatigued me. The loss of my two senior priestesses has seriously disrupted my religious and administrative duties to the degree that I'm improvising from day to day. At this moment there are only three Vestals serving the shrine, and one of them is a novice. When I return to Rome, there'll be myself, two serving priestesses and three novices. And the two serving Vestals are young women only a year or two out of their novitiate. A month ago, I had four serving Vestals, two of them with more than twenty years service. I can no longer oversee the shrine without adequate staff."

She fell silent. After a pause, Tiberius said, "Then, dammit, we'll have to do something about it!" He did something alien to his nature; he reached out and took her hand in one of his and patted it gently with the other.

"Cornelia, I wouldn't send a legion into battle without sufficient officers or weapons, and I won't see you guarding the hearth of Rome without the resources you need. No, damn me, I won't!"

Releasing her hand, he again stood up and paced back and forth. "Now then, have you any thoughts on what can be done now? Later, when you've had time to study it closer, you can come

up with other suggestions."

"Yes, Caesar. There is something that will relieve the stress. I wish to have six sacristans serving the shrine. I know it's a break in convention, but there's precedent for it. The many shrines to Vesta throughout the provinces are tended by sacristans, not priestesses. It's only because the sacred fire of Vesta burns in Rome that the goddess is served there by priestesses."

Tiberius looked doubtful. "Are you saying that the altar fire should be attended by sacristans instead of Vestals?"

"Never that," she said. "They would assist in other duties which at present take too much of the Vestals' time and which aren't liturgical because they don't involve prayer, sacrifice or tending the altar fire."

"Such as?"

"The daily drawing of water from the Egerian spring. It's almost a mile walk to the spring so there's an hour lost out of the Vestal's day. Shrine servants carry the water, but convention has a priestess present. A sacristan drawing the water isn't going to render it less sacred, is it? Then when the shrine floor has been washed, the Egerian water is sprinkled on it. I doubt that washing and sprinkling by sacristans will displease the goddess."

Tiberius laughed. "As far as I'm concerned there's no such thing as a sacred spring. Bunch of claptrap nonsense based on mythology so ancient that nobody knows what it means. Does that offend you?"

"Caesar is blunt," she smiled. "So I shall be also. No, you don't offend me. I believe in the major gods, the Olympians and many of the others; but I have no credence in the pantheon of lesser gods and demi-gods, especially in those that infest nature. Nymphs of the forests, streams, and mountains. Nymphs indeed! And as for the gods of the crossroads! How many crossroads are there throughout the empire and each with its own god? Just what are they protecting? It makes a mockery of religion.

"Damn me, Cornelia, you're my kind of woman." Then, jestingly, "And yet you continue to draw water daily from a sacred spring."

"Only because it's a long-established ritual which I can't change by decree. However, were the *pontifex maximus* to declare that the spring of Egeria was no longer sacred for whatever reason..."

"Very well, Cornelia. I concede your point. But we're meandering. How else would sacristans be of help?"

The *sacricola* priestess makes daily sacrifice of salt cakes on the altar and she also prepares the cakes. The offering of the sacrifice is a liturgical act, yes, but the making of cakes certainly isn't. They can be made by a sacristan. And on the subject of the altar," she continued, "a sacristan could observe the sacred fire during the night hours. At present a priestess must check on it periodically. That wasn't a problem when there were four or five Vestals to share the duty. With only two, it's a hardship. A sacristan wouldn't assume the duty of maintaining the fire; she'd only report to the priestess when the fire needed tending."

"Makes sense to me."

"There are other things, but I won't bother you with them now. May I assume you approve of my acquiring and training six sacristans?"

He nodded assent. "But where will you find them?"

"Ah," she said, "I already have them."

"You do?"

"They're shrine servants. Four are freedwomen, two are slaves. All have been with me

several years and know the routine of shrine and residence thoroughly."

"But Cornelia, *slaves* as shrine attendants?"

"Certainly not, Caesar. But when I return to Rome, they will be freedwomen. They're state-owned slaves assigned to a shrine, so they come under your *potestas*. When I depart tomorrow morning, I wish to have their documents of manumission with me. And I'll need replacements for the women who are to become sacristans. Not for all of them, because they'll still be able to carry out some of their present duties, but three at least. So, I also wish a letter from you directing your secretary for administration to provide the shrine with three slaves of my selection."

"You shall have it and the slaves' liberation papers when you leave, Cornelia. My privy clerk, Ilus, is with me and I'll tell him at once. He'll probably have the documents ready for signature and witnessing by the time we've finished dining tonight. So then, what are the slaves' names?"

"Echonis and Turia," the Chief Vestal replied.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"Echonis and Turia. You were concerned about them when we last spoke."

"Yes, lady," I replied. "And I still am."

She smiled. "They are freedwomen, Anthus. Here. You may look at these." She indicated two documents on her office table. They were letters of *manumissio* for Echonis and Turia, 'faithful servants over the age of thirty commended for their compliant behavior, loyalty and obedience,' signed by Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Nero and bearing the imprint of his *sigilla* on the wax seal. One of the witnessing signatures was that of Cornelia, Chief Vestal.

Now I smiled. "Thank you, lady. I am most pleased."

"And I also. So let the advocates summon them as witnesses if they wish. They'll testify as freedwomen, not as slaves."

The lady Cornelia returned from Puteoli late yesterday and sent a courier asking me to call upon her this morning. She knew that I was troubled over the matter of the two shrine servants being called as witnesses at the trial and being interrogated under torture because they were slaves.

She told me briefly about the use of sacristans in the shrine to ease the burden of the serving priestesses, then asked if anything of interest had occurred in her absence.

"Last night I was told by Sutorius Macro that the trial will commence on the fourth day before the *calends* of October, eight days after the games are completed," I replied. "A public announcement will be made today."

She reflected on this. "I knew that a court wouldn't be convened during the games in honor of Jupiter. But why the delay after that?"

"Lady, the urban *praetor* was petitioned jointly by the prosecution and defense advocates to afford them extra time to prepare their cases. Their progress would be impeded while the games were being held, so they claimed."

"They claimed with good reason, I dare say," she said. "The entire city becomes insane during *ludi!* It's not so much a celebration dedicated to Jupiter as it is an excuse for the senseless slaughter of men and animals, drunkenness, street brawling and sexual depravity. Sixteen days of it!"

I took it that the Chief Vestal disapproved of the spectacles. And yet she had to participate. The Vestal Virgins were always in the opening procession on the first day and were seated in a place of honor to observe the entertainment.

After a few minutes of polite chatter, I took my leave. She's a busy woman and although the strain of the last three weeks shows, she's more relaxed today than when we last met.

Passing through the forum on my way home, my eye was caught by the posters proclaiming events to be held during the Roman Games starting in two more days. I don't know if regulations exist governing the display of these lurid announcements, but there certainly should be! When the divine Augustus erected a temple to his adoptive father, Julius Caesar, I doubt he intended the front of its rostra to advertise that the renowned gladiators Pamphilus, a Thracian swordsman, and Scylax, a net and trident *retiarius*, would be matched in the arena. Or that Titus Nobilior, champion of the White stable, would be vying with Sextus Gutta, leading charioteer of the greens.

There wasn't a building in the forum that didn't have games announcements plastered on its walls. Even the Golden Milepost was bedecked with the program of a Greek acting company that will be performing tragedy and comedy in various theaters.

Temples and monuments should be protected from such arrant advertising, in my opinion! The magistrates have never sought my advice on the matter, however.

My wife Petronia and I will attend the opening day ceremony of the games in the Circus Maximus. Macro, being a man of influence, acquired a block of seats for his less privileged acquaintances and he gave me two tickets. When I say, 'less privileged,' I refer to the man on the street who has to compete with the entire populace for a seat. The senatorials and knights have reserved sections in the Circus, but the rest of us have to scramble for our places. However, Petronia and I shall be in the tenth tier, close to the tribunal *judicum*, the umpires' seats. An excellent location.

"I'm not too sure Petronia will enjoy the chariot races all that much. But I'm sure she'll like the opening procession, the *pompa*, with its colorful pageantry. And I'll take her to the comedies performed by the Greek actors. She has a sense of humor. But, being a woman, the tragedies would be far over her head, of course.

Macro gave me tickets also for the gladiatorial contests and the wild animal hunts. I'm looking forward to those. But I won't take Petronia to the blood sports. Two years ago, we attended the Apollinarian Games, and she wept when a young elephant, not more than four feet high, was mauled by two tigers. She said the elephant screamed like a child while it was being killed by the tigers. Women! I ask you, what can you do with them?

CHAPTER XXIX

"I've learned a few things since we last met, not always favorable to you," Crispus said. "But I'll decide what I'm to do after I've listened to your side of things."

The advocate and Gaius Quintus were seated in the same chamber where they'd first met five days earlier. Crispus noted that his client wore a clean tunic and was freshly shaven.

"Your trial has been set for the eighth day after the games, twenty-four days from now," Crispus stated. "I'd hoped for more time, but the *praetor* was reluctant to grant what he did. It was Cassius Longinus, the prosecutor, who really convinced him. They're related, second cousins or whatever, but then everyone in Rome is related to everyone else in the patrician aristocracy."

Gaius Quintus looked bleak. "You said you'd learned things not in my favor."

"Concerning your family, yes. It helps a defendant if the judges see his family rallying around, exhibiting the good old Roman virtue of loyalty and all that. But it seems that neither your birth nor adoptive families, the Floriani and Haterii, are anxious to support you."

Clenching his fists, Gaius Quintus glared. "Curse every one of the miserable bastards!"

"Well, that's exactly how they seem to feel about you. So, let's get down to business. I trust you've prepared your life story for me. Tell me while we sample whatever hideous vintage your Praetorian jailer has given us."

"Before I begin, Crispus, why am I being held in the Praetorian camp?"

"The Tullianum is being renovated and the lockups used by the Urban Cohorts aren't secure enough for an important prisoner like yourself. In a way you're lucky. This is much preferable."

For the next two hours, Gaius Quintus related his life history, queried occasionally by the advocate. He ended by telling of Serena Hateria's request that he find an abortionist, of the physician Kastor, of his meeting Marcia Renata at the temple of Saturn and his fraudulent revision of the will.

"But I did not murder my sister or anyone else! I swear to you Crispus, I didn't!" He was almost crying in frustration.

"If you say so," Crispus said blandly. "I've told you I don't care a fig whether you did or not. My only concern is to prevent the prosecution from convincing the jury that you did the deed."

Arising, Crispus went to the window, stretched, nodded amiably to the two guards posted outside, then returned to the table. "Well," he said, "that's quite a story. And I suspect a bit of fiction mixed with fact."

He stared at Gaius Quintus, eyebrows raised skeptically. "In essence, you seem to believe that the entire world has plotted against you from birth in the face of your noble effort to improve your lot. But, you see, there's just too much on public records to make that plausible. The fact really is that you've squandered your chances in an irresponsible pursuit of self-pleasure and it's time you admitted it to yourself. At least you've been honest about falsifying your sister's will. As for your story about the Vestal Marcia having an abortion, forget it! It can't be proven in court. A pity that the physician is dead. And such an accusation would only serve to enhance the outrage already aimed at you from every direction. By the way, did you kill the physician? Oh, don't answer that. I don't care either way. But, believe me, if you refer to this alleged abortion, you're sure to be accused of the physician's murder on top of everything else."

Gaius Quintus buried his face in his hands, then raised teary eyes to the advocate. "Oh, Crispus," he moaned in utter misery, "what's going to happen to me?"

CHAPTER XXX

The sun was low in a clear blue sky when Petronia and I set out. It was still in the first day hour, plenty of time before the mid-morning opening of the *ludi Romani* with the entrance of the colorful procession into the amphitheater. The streets were crowded, everyone heading toward the same place, the Circus Maximus.

There must be forty or fifty entrance gates and each one had a thousand or more people jostling and pushing their way into the arena. It holds two hundred and fifty thousand spectators, about a quarter of the population of Rome. We presented our ivory *tesserae* to the ticket-taker at the reserved section gate and soon we were in our seats. The first fourteen rows are reserved for the aristocracy, and we were in the next tier up. The upper tiers are wooden but at our level they're stone. I rented pillows for us to sit on, two each of us when I saw how threadbare the wretched things were.

The Circus is about eighteen hundred feet long and six hundred wide, rounded at one end, with a flattened curve at the other. A high barricade about a thousand feet long runs down the center, the *spina*. This is the focal point of the amphitheater, surmounted by statues on high pillars, altars, fountains and, in the very center, a hug obelisk brought from Egypt by the divine Augustus.

There's a small underground temple to Consus at one end of the *spina*. Consus is the god of racing, amongst other things, and his temple is only opened during the games.

The starting gates are at the flattened end, twelve stalls enclosing the horses and chariots until they're all opened at the same time. In the middle of the row of stalls is the Porta Pompa, the gate where the procession enters.

Today's procession quite thrilled Petronia, as I thought it would. Many of the games are paid for by wealthy men seeking election to magisterial office, in which case the man sponsoring the event, the *editor*, leads the procession in a splendid chariot, wearing a purple toga. The Roman Games in honor of Jupiter are state sponsored so there was no *editor*. Instead, one of the consuls came first, a slave standing behind him in the chariot and holding a golden crown above the consul's head. Several hundred youths from the aristocratic families followed on foot, some still wearing the toga of childhood. These were symbolic of the future of Rome, boys who would soon be men defending the state.

The charioteers came next, about fifty of them in their four faction colors of Red, White, Blue, and Green. Their horses were a glorious sight, decorated with peacock feathers, colored plumes, and jeweled bridles glinting in the sun. When the charioteers drew abreast the subterranean altar of Consus, they stopped and one from each faction entered the temple with a priest to offer sacrifice. This took but a couple of minutes and then the parade continued. Musicians, dancers, and acrobats followed the charioteers, dressed in garish costumes and throwing flowers and candied fruit up to the spectators. Next was a long parade of chariots and litters bearing the statues of gods and demigods and heroes from Rome's past. The parade ended with the senior magistrates and priests, including the Vestal Virgins. Of these, only the Vestals rode in chariots, the first one carrying Cornelia, the Chief Vestal. I admired her composed, aristocratic deportment, knowing the stress she had endured in recent times. As she passed, each section of the crowd roared, "Ave, *Cornelia, virgo vestalis maxima!*" to which she bowed her head graciously in acknowledgment.

After making a circuit of the *spina* the procession disbanded and the priests were escorted to

their places close by the imperial box. The officials now made the draw to determine the racing order and the chariot positions, from the inside lane closest to the *spina*, to the outside.

There were to be fifteen races, ranging from two to four-horse chariots. The first was a two-horse event, a *bigae*, with eight contestants, two from each faction. At the blare of a trumpet the crowd hushed, and the presiding consul stood in his box holding aloft a white cloth. The ear-splitting roar of the crowd rolled across the city when the cloth was dropped, and eight teams of horses burst from the starting gates. The inside lane had gone to a Red charioteer who held his position as the horses thundered past our section and disappeared around the far end of the *spina*. When they reappeared on the second lap the Red had fallen back, a Green now leading on the inside. The others were bunched close behind.

Rounding the starting gate end of the *spina* to begin the fifth lap, the Green was still inside but he cut too close, and his left wheel struck one of the stone cones, the *metae*, positioned at each end of the *spina* to protect it from damage. His chariot bounced and rolled for a few hundred feet until the horses stopped running. There was no sign of the driver until the dust cleared. Then he could be seen lying on the track mangled and bloodied by his own shattered vehicle and the hooves and wheels of the following chariots which were unable to avoid him.

When the remaining teams, now led by a White, rounded the other end of the *spina*, two attendants in green tunics ran out from a recess in the *spina* wall and dragged the charioteer by the wrists back to their cubby-hole.

At the end of the seventh lap, only five contestants pounded past us toward the finish line opposite the umpire's box. A two-chariot pile-up on the far side of the *spina* had killed one driver, a Blue, and badly maimed the other, a White. The first race was won by a black man, Crescens of the Green faction. His horses were Polydoxus, a gray, and Tuscus, a chestnut—both Sicilian stallions—and both foaming and heaving after the three-mile non-stop gallop. A herald on top of the *spina* waved a large green pennant to show the spectators which faction had won, while Crescens strode proudly amid the thunderous applause to the magistrate's box to receive his laurel crown. Later he would be given a prize of money as well.

The mob was in high spirits over the first race. That's how a race should be—drivers killed and maimed, horses with broken legs having their throats cut. I don't agree! The races are contests of skill. We're supposed to admire the charioteers and their beautiful steeds—but it seems most spectators are hoping for spectacular calamity.

While the dead horses were dragged away by mules, the dead and wounded charioteers carried off on stretchers, and the sand-covered track raked and smoothed by the Circus groundsmen, the *procuratores dromi*, the spectators were entertained by trick riders. Some jumped back and forth from one horse to another at the gallop; others hung upside down with legs hooked around the galloping horses' neck and plucked colored cloths from the ground. One woman made a circuit of the track standing on her hands on the back of a cantering horse. Petronia squealed with delight at all this. I found it rather amusing myself.

The entertainers vacated the arena and the spectators again fell silent when the trumpet sounded, all eyes on the magistrate's white cloth. This was the crowd's favorite race, the *quadrigae*, one four-horse team from each faction. Again, the reverberating roar as sixteen horses erupted from the stalls. A Blue had drawn the inside position and held it for four laps before a Green edged him out. But when they came around the *spina* to start the sixth lap, the Green chariot was empty, its four steeds galloping in third place. The charioteer had obviously fallen out of his vehicle on the opposite side of the *spina*.

This time the herald waved a Red pennant. As the winner swaggered to the magistrate's box

a noisy fracas broke out behind us. A number of Red supporters loudly proclaimed their faction's win, jeering at a group of White followers seated nearby. The White driver had been a close second. The Whites responded to the Red taunts and in seconds the two had joined in bloody battle, women included. It took the arena security guards ten minutes to restore order with their cudgels. I recalled the Chief Vestal's comment about drunken brawling.

Absorbed by the Red and White turmoil, I'd paid scant attention to the between-races entertainment. Petronia told me that tiny chariots driven by trained monkeys were pulled by dogs and that groups of bears dressed in tunics and caps danced to flutes and tabors. Interesting in its way, I suppose.

It was now the seventh hour, when events usually stopped while the spectators ate their lunches and socialized. But the opening ceremony had taken a large bite out of the morning, so the races continued without intermission. Petronia had brought a small basket of bread, cheese, fruit, and a flask of wine which we enjoyed during the next few races. Not many years back, the divine Augustus decreed that food was not to be eaten in the amphitheaters. He seemed to think it lowered the social standard somehow. He also ruled that those entitled to wear a toga must do so at the games. But he's gone now, and his successor Tiberius made it quite plain that the games hold little interest for him. So, the standards have slipped back to the good old days and everybody, aristocrats and all, eats and drinks. The only togae to be seen were those worn by the officials and some of the more fastidious citizens.

It was late afternoon in the tenth hour when a Blue won the eleventh race, a three-horse event. Petronia had been squirming for a while and I'd had my fill of the races for one day, so we left. In a souvenir shop in the street level arcade, we bought a small plaster figurine of a charioteer for young Rufinus.



Two days later, we attended the theater of Balbus. Located on the edge of the Field of Mars, it's a small structure and only seats about eight thousand. The Greeks performed three comedies. Petronia thought them delightful, happily giggling and chortling throughout.

I found them, oh, mildly amusing at times but they all had the same basic plot—the wife hiding her lover in a chest or closet or wherever when her thick-headed husband returns home unexpectedly. And, of course, the garrulous comic slave dashing hither and thither, shouting asides laced with lecherous double meaning. By and large, I find these so-called comedies all much of sameness.

I hope future playwrights and actors aspire to a higher quality and don't design their productions for the least sophisticated and lowest mentalities in the audience.

CHAPTER XXXI

Corax looked up from his accounts in exasperation. "I'm busy, Oscia. Tell him to come back later, mid-morning."

From the door of the small office the serving girl stammered uncertainly, "*Domine*, he wears a knight's tunic."

Damn and blast! thought Corax. Not another bloody magistrate's inquiry into some bloody inconsequential regulation designed to molest people trying to make an honest living!

But he smiled at the girl. "Very well, Oscia, you may show him in." Expecting a haughty municipal officer, Corax was surprised when a young man strode in and cheerily inquired, "Gnaeus Caecina Corax?"

The tavern-keeper nodded respectfully. "At your service, sir."

"I'm Quintus Vibius Crispus, defending advocate for Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus whose trial is in two weeks time. Yes, Corax, I believe you can be of service to me. Can we talk now, or shall I return later?" He glanced through the door at the girl sweeping floor. "And our conversation should be confidential."

"I have quarters on the floor above, sir."

Crispus looked around the sitting room of the small apartment while Corax opened a flask of Picene in honor of his exalted guest. The *insula* was a drab, working-man's tenement but Corax was obviously house-proud, and his possessions were of good quality. These were chairs, table, lamps, an Egyptian carpet, and a tasteful bucolic mural that covered most of one wall. Two small statues stood side by side in a wall niche, Mercury with his *caduceus* and Hercules with his club. Crispus smiled. Corax is a merchant, a small businessman, and these are the two gods dear to merchants, be they aristocrats with vast holdings or roadside peddlers.

Crispus raised the cup to his host across the table and complimented him on the excellent wine. Then he got down to business. "I won't waste your time, Corax. You're a busy man, as I am. You know the man I'm defending, Gaius Quintus. How well and how long have you been acquainted?"

Corax scratched his head. "Well, I guess it's been about two years, sir. Gaius Quintus, he lived here, y'see, up on the third floor. He was a regular in the tavern, bein' so handy. Don't live here now, of course. Came into some money four, five weeks ago and moved to better lodgings, something more suited to a man of his station. Only seen him once since he left."

"Would you call him a good friend?"

"In a way, maybe, sir. We was friendly enough. Everybody seemed to like him. He was the sort that had a word for everyone and wasn't afraid to buy a round when he had the money. But he's a patrician and so there's that barrier, know what I mean? I guess you'd say we aren't good friends but more like friendly acquaintances."

"He says that on the night of August the eleventh he was in your tavern," said Crispus. "That was the night of the Vestal murders, possibly after midnight. Even though it was five weeks ago, he swears he was there all night. Says it was the next day he learned of his adoptive sister's death. Can you remember the occasion, Corax, even though some time has passed?"

Not really anticipating much help here, Crispus was elated when the tavern-keeper grinned. "Oh yes, he was in the tavern that night, sir. I remember well. He had to be carried to his room, didn't he? Knee walkin' inebriated was Gaius Quintus that night." He shook his head. "Not often he got that way, mind you, but the wine was free, and he'd had a few cups too many."

"Why does that date stick in your mind?"

"Hercules," answered Corax, gesturing respectfully toward the statuette of the god. "The next day, the twelfth, was his feast day, wasn't it? And every year I go to his temple. You know, the small round one close by the Circus Maximus? I make my offering the day before. I'm not wealthy but I always make a *donatio* of five gold pieces and then the next day I attend the sacrifice at the temple. Of course, this year the rites were cancelled what with the Vestal business and all."

"But, Corax, why does all that make you recall Gaius Quintus being in your tavern that night?"

"Well now, sir, on the day I make my annual offering, I close the tavern that night except for my regular customers by invitation. Sort of a private party with food and drinks on the house. And Gaius Quintus was there. Before he got taken with the grape, he was entertaining the crowd with some off-color songs. Quite a wit, is Gaius Quintus."

"So, there were several others who saw him that night."

"There was, sir. About maybe thirty people."

"You said he had to be carried to his room. Can you recall who helped him?"

"Sure do, sir," Corax said. "It was me and Probus."

"Probus. Freeborn or freedman? Tell me about him."

"He's a freeman, sir. A brick maker now but did sixteen years in the army. About forty years old. He isn't married. Maybe he was once but if so, he don't mention it. Why're you interested in him, sir?"

"I need witnesses, Corax. I need reliable people who can testify to Gaius Quintus being in your tavern the night of the murders. I've already looked into your past and you're ideal to bear witness, with no previous criminal or civil charges, an official of the Taverners Guild and even your *cognomen* 'Corax' proclaims you as descendant of a true Latin family, not some Romanized alien. I need you, Corax."

Staring forlornly at the tabletop, Corax hesitated. "Sir, I'd like to help, but I'm not a learned man, not very good with words. I might mess things up in front of all them judges."

Crispus had to assure him. "You'll only have to answer the questions I ask and those of the prosecutor. There'll be no need for you to make a speech." Seeing the doubt in the tavern-keeper's eyes, Crispus added, "Gaius Quintus needs you, Corax. He's facing a death penalty. You could save him."

Corax sighed. "If you really think it'll help, sir, I'll do it. I'll do my best."

"Thank you, Corax. And you'll be given one hundred gold pieces in recompense...no, don't protest...it's little enough to repay you for your assistance and inconvenience. You'll have to leave the tavern in somebody else's hands for a day or two."

"I'd do it without the money. I feel awkward taking money for such a thing."

"Don't. But one more thing..."

"Sir?"

"*Testis unus, testis nullus.* I need at least one more witness. Juries are leery of testimony offered by one person only. So I'd like to talk your friend Probus and request his help also."

"He works not far from here in a brickyard, sir. Comes most every day to the tavern for lunch. You could see him at noon today, I'm sure."



"You're still getting a fresh tunic and a shave every day, I see," Crispus observed. "How's the food?"

Gaius Quintus shrugged. "They're not exactly breaking the sumptuary laws, but it's adequate."

"Good. And now to business. Your trial begins in fourteen days. I still have a little digging to do but in a couple of days I'll start preparing my defense arguments. We'll be fighting an uphill battle, but I have one item of good news. Corax the tavern-keeper and Probus, one of his customers, are willing to testify that you were in the tavern the night of the murders. Drunk out of your mind, so they say. They carried you to your room."

Gaius Quintus slumped with a sigh. "Good old Corax. I was hoping he'd remember. And Probus, too. Well, that should help us, eh, Crispus?"

"It should. But it may not. A clever advocate could shatter their testimony, make them appear unreliable witnesses. But I'll coach them thoroughly, prepare them for the mud-slinging they can expect from the prosecution. And something else—you're going to give each of them one hundred *aurei*."

Gaius Quintus sat up, sucking in his breath. "A hundred gold pieces. Each? They had to be bribed?"

"No, they didn't. Both said they'd be your witnesses without any mention of money. That was my idea. It's not a bribe. It's recompense for their time and loyalty to you. I've found nobody else who will utter one word on your behalf. And Gaius Quintus, what's twenty thousand *sestertii* to you? You gained five million by your adoptive sister's will."

Crispus placed a tablet on the table. "This is a letter of authorization to your banker, instructing him to release three hundred *aurei* to me. One hundred is for me. I've had various expenses in recent weeks, gaining the confidence of petty officials and clerks on your behalf. Here, sign it."

He put the signed tablet into his leather pouch. "I'll tell you this, Gaius Quintus—if I had to bribe your witnesses, I would. And if you could afford it, I'd damn well try to bribe every member of the jury. Bribery is a way of life in the law courts of Rome, as it is in the political world. There hasn't been a consul or lesser magistrate elected in the history of Rome who hasn't bribed his way into office. And I'm talking millions of gold pieces, not just a few hundred. I'll be back in a few days."

CHAPTER XXXII

Today, the tenth day of the games, I went to the gladiatorial and wild animal events in the amphitheater of Statilius Taurus close to the baths of Agrippa in the ninth district.

My ivory ticket was inscribed '*cuneus III, inferiori gradu decimo VI*'. Seat six in the lower tier of section three was a good one, about a hundred feet to the left of the imperial box located on the wide first tier *podium*. The box was empty until a few minutes before the opening procession, then ten or twelve people made their grand entrance. I recognized Caesar's nephew Claudius, and Caligula, the nephew of Claudius. The others I didn't know. When they arrived the spectators arose, shouting greetings and the knights in their reserved section flapped the left-hand drape of their togae in respect.

In contrast to the opening day rites at the Circus Maximus, today's procession was brief. The event was sponsored privately by a rising young aristocrat seeking public office. As *editor*, he led the procession, draped in a purple toga, and pulled in a gold and silver chariot by two white horses. Behind him were several hundred followers on foot, family, friends, and *clientes*.

Musicians and twirling dancers came next, leading twenty or more flower-decked girls who flung favors into the screaming spectators who scrambled to retrieve the small packages containing a range of gifts from fruit and candies to gold coins and jewels.

But now came the gladiators! Glorious in their gold and purple capes, sixty of them marched in ranks of three abreast. Thracians with their helmets, body armor, red loin cloths, small round shields, and curved swords, Samnites in helmets, carrying straight swords and large, oblong curved shields. The *retiarii* with the nets and tridents, barefoot and without armor save a metal *gasterius* covering the left shoulder. There were some others that I couldn't identify. New classes of gladiators appear every year, it seems.

As they passed the *editor*, the fighters raised their right arm in salute, repeating the gesture when they passed the imperial box on the opposite side of the arena. Had the emperor been present, they would have stopped, saluted, and shouted in unison '*Ave, Caesar! Morituri te salutamus!*' But Caesar wasn't there, so they 'who were about to die' passed in silence.

After the procession ended, the *probatio armorum* began, the inspection of arms, a prerogative of the *editor*. While he ensured that the cutting edges of swords and barbs of tridents were sharpened to his satisfaction, many of the gladiators diverted the crowd with warming-up exercises such as hurling their shields high into the air and catching them. Others approached the sides of the arena and chatted with the spectators. A burly Samnite pointed to a woman seated near me and called out, "*Eho, Gaia!* Bet on me and you'll be rewarded!" Gaia, being a commonplace name, is often used when addressing a woman you don't know.

"Win the fight, handsome," she shouted back, "and I'll reward you with something you've never had before!"

"What have you got? Leprosy?" he rejoindered, to the delight of the crowd.

A trumpet signaled the end of the arms inspection and the gladiators assembled before the *editor* for the pairing of combatants. The lots were drawn quickly, the arena cleared, and the spectators hushed. A trumpet's shrill wail broke the silence and the first pair of gladiators marched side by side to the center of the arena. One was a Thracian, the other a *retiarius*. Gladiators never fight a member of their own class. They turned to the *editor*, raised their sword and trident in salute, then faced each other. From the side of the arena an official shouted "Approach"—the order to commence.

Touching weapons ritually, they parted a few paces, then circled each other cautiously, the *retiarius* skipping away when the Thracian lunged at him. This wasn't cowardice. The net man had to keep his distance in order to use his net with effect. He swung his weighted net in slow circles, balanced by the five-foot trident in his left hand. A cord attached to outer rim of the net was secured to his wrist; this enabled him to retrieve the net if it failed to enmesh his opponent or tighten the meshes if his cast caught the Thracian.

Three times the *retiarius* flung the net over the Thracian but each time it was deflected by the swordsman's small shield. Then, as the net man yanked his net back after the third cast, the Thracian lunged with the speed of a striking snake and slashed the net man's left arm just above the elbow. Blood spurting, the *retiarius* dropped his trident and fled from the swordsman, trailing his net behind him. The barefoot net man, unhindered by leg armor, outpaced the other and after he'd run a hundred feet, stopped and scooped up his net. His bloodied left arm was obviously beyond use but with his good hand he cast the net just as the Thracian caught up with him.

A roar exploded from the crowd as the net snared the Thracian from helmet to elbows. The wounded man pulled his cord taut and ran in a circle around the swordsman, who kept turning to face him, knowing his foe was trying to pull him off-balance. Although the swordsman's shield and weapon were free of the net, his elbows were pinioned tightly to his sides, hampering his movement. Now the *retiarius* ceased his circling and hauled on the cord as though trying to force the other to follow him.

His helmet had been pulled low over his forehead by the net and the Thracian couldn't see what the net man was trying to do. But the spectators could and roared their encouragement as the wounded *retiarius* fought to reach the spot where he'd dropped his trident! When he was some twenty feet from it, he released the net cord and ran to retrieve his barbed weapon. Feeling the meshes loosen, the Thracian flexed his arms, tore the net away with his sword hand and tossed it to the ground. He advanced toward the *retiarius* who, this time, did not retreat, having sacrificed the net to recover his trident.

The amphitheater was soundless; the spectators knew the end was close. The *retiarius*, disabled and weak from the loss of blood, his net gone, stood motionless with his trident poised at shoulder height as he waited for the swordsman's attack. Then, in one swift, fluid movement, he feinted at the Thracian's left shoulder, then drove the tines of his trident into the Thracian's right groin at the exact moment the swordsman's blade stabbed deeply into his abdomen.

Drenched with blood, the net man slumped to his knees, leaning on his right arm. The Thracian dropped sword and shield and with both hands ripped the embedded trident from his leg. The sand of the arena was spattered with the blood of both men.

What happened next must have touched the hearts of even the most hardened arena enthusiasts. In obvious agony, the swordsman assisted the net man to change position so that he was facing the *editor* in his box about fifty feet distant. The two fighters said something to each other and then the swordsman held his hand gently on the other's shoulder for a moment. He picked up his sword and shield and stood quietly behind the kneeling man.

It was time for the missio, the appeal for clemency. The *retiarius*, though badly wounded, was still alive. He looked at the editor and painfully raised his trembling right hand, the index finger pointing up. The appeal.

Arising, the *editor* looked around at the spectators, heard their shouts of 'Mitte!' and saw their fists held out with thumbs upward. Impressed by the bravery and bearing of the conquered net man, the crowd wanted him spared. Wishing to curry favor with the spectators—he would soon be running for magisterial election—the editor thrust out a thumbs-up fist to the crowd's

roar of approval.

They were still cheering as stretcher bearers ran to the wounded gladiators and carried them to the arena infirmary. The opening fight had been a crowd-pleaser. Lots of action, lots of blood.

Most of us stood up and stretched while the arena sand was raked and smoothed and bloody patches covered over. As the attendants trotted away, the next pair of gladiators marched in to the blare of the trumpet. It was to be a Thracian against a *myrmillo* this time. The *myrmillo* is also a swordsman. Unlike the Thracian, he wears no arm or leg armor but carries a large oblong shield and has a face-visored helmet surmounted by the replica of a fish.

In contrast to the wary tactics of the previous fighters, these two joined battle at once, the ringing clash of metal on metal heard above the shouts of the crowd. After a couple of minutes of unrelenting combat, they stepped back from each other as though by mutual accord, panting with their exertion. At this the spectators sneered and cried insults and called for the *lanistae*, the owner-trainers, to whip and brand the combatants into action. Professional gladiators are rarely subjected to such treatment but other contestants, such as condemned criminals forced to fight each other, are goaded with whips and hot irons when they display reluctance.

Again, the fighters engaged, this time the *myrmillo* using his large shield as a battering ram, driving it into the Thracian as their swords slashed and thrust. This went on for a minute or two, although it seemed longer. The *myrmillo* caught the Thracian on the left ear protector of his helmet with a powerful horizontal sword slash. As the Thracian staggered and his knees buckled, his opponent smashed him to the ground with his shield and held the point of his blade to the fallen man's breast.

They appeared to be talking, although their face guards obscured their mouths. After a pause the *myrmillo* stepped back a pace and the Thracian rose slowly to one knee, facing the editor. He raised his right index finger in supplication.

No mercy was granted by the crowd this time. They had been cheated; too brief a contest and not a drop of blood drawn! A poor show indeed! Quite annoyed myself, I joined the mob in presenting a thumbs-down fist. The editor scanned the spectators and raised his arm for silence.

"*Jugula!*" he shouted, making the *pollice verso*, the thumbs-down sign for death. "Cut his throat!"

The arena was still as the gladiator who was about to die steadied himself by gripping the knees of the *myrmillo* who now stood before him. He bent his helmeted head far back. The victor, with an upward thrust from the side, buried sword into the exposed throat.

A gasp of satisfaction rippled through the crowd. The Thracian remained kneeling a few seconds, then fell sideways onto the reddening sand. But then the arena was stilled again at the sight of the dying gladiator striving to lift himself onto his left elbow, as though reclining at ease on a dining room couch. Slowly, tremulously, he raised his right arm, extending his open hand in salute. Then he died.

There was total silence in the arena. The stillness was broken by a woman's tinkling laughter from the imperial box. Perhaps it was her unfeeling snickering that made me do it. Or perhaps it was my own sense of shame for having made the thumbs-down sign, but I leapt to my feet and shouted as loud as I could, "*Macte virtute, Thrax!*" Within seconds the entire crowd was standing and roaring, "Well done, Thracian!" over and over.

Moments earlier we had demanded his death. Now we gave him a standing ovation for the *dignitas* with which he met that death.

By the close of the sixth hour another five pairs of gladiators had performed. I was three *denarii* to the good by then, having placed a few bets with the bookmakers who circulate in the

tiers between events.

Gladiatorial combat is suspended during the noon hour, when the spectators eat their lunch and chatter. Custom has it, however, that something must always be in progress to entertain the crowd. The *editor* had arranged for several condemned criminals to be slain by wild beasts, a fairly common event. They were going to be executed in any event, so why not amuse the citizens at the same time? Seems reasonable.

Spectators munched on their cold sausage, cheese, and bread as the first six criminals were led chained and naked into the arena. One was a woman. Tall posts set into heavy wooden platforms were dragged to locations scattered around the arena to afford each section of the crowd a good view. One was about fifty feet in front of my section. A young man, little more than a boy, was secured to the post, facing outward with his wrists secured to an iron ring above his head, his eyes bulging in terror.

The holiday crowd cheered lustily as attendants hauled in low carts bearing cages. In each was a large bear. I heard a nearby spectator say the bears were captured in the mountain area of upper Germany. When the cages were about ten feet from the posts, attendants infuriated the huge animals by stabbing their rumps with sharpened stakes. They then slashed the helpless victims across the thighs with a sword to provide blood-scent for the bears. Straw was stuffed into cages, then set afire, driving the frenzied animals out of the cage doors. The attendants ran for safety.

I'd attended the blood-sports before but never saw a criminal execution. I had conflicting emotions about it. These were condemned criminals so had only themselves to thank for their situation. Yet in a way it seemed a little harsh to kill them like this. Hanging, beheading, garroting, being flung from the Tarpeian Rock, even crucifixion, are much more civilized. Not as amusing for the spectators, of course. And after all, that's what the games are all about, isn't it?

A half-starved, abused bear circled the youth who hung motionless from the post, eyes clenched shut. Drawn by the smell of the blood puddling at the criminal's feet, it approached the post, paused, the seized the victim's right thigh in its massive jaws, wrenching its head violently and tearing at the flesh. The youth screamed in pain and terror. This seemed to startle the bear, for it backed off for a moment before standing on its hind legs and ripping the criminal's abdomen open with a powerful slash of claws. The crowd around me shouted with excitement as the gaping wound spilled the criminal's intestines to the platform. The bear now gnawed and tore at the youth's left shoulder, ripping off a chunk of flesh. It walked off a few feet to devour it. The mangled victim screamed no more; he was probably dead. The horrible shrieks from the other parts of the arena had ceased also.

But there were more prisoners to provide entertainment. Archers on the lowest tier killed the bears. There wasn't time for the professional beast keepers to put the animals back in their cages. When the bears were dead or disabled, the animal slayers, the *confectores*, finished them off with spears. As the first six bodies were dragged from the arena, the next six were brought in and secured to the blood smeared posts.

The cages held lions this time. Again, the goading with sharpened stakes and the burning straw. The screaming ended more quickly than before. Lions are more efficient killers than bears, it seems. Again, the archers. Human and animal bodies were hauled away. The upright posts were also hauled away.

Five men and a woman, naked but not chained, were taken to the center of the arena. Ten minutes later their mutilated bodies were scattered on the sand, mingled with a dozen arrow-pierced wolves with bloodied snouts.

The last of the condemned were brought to the center of the arena, three men and a girl about fifteen. I wondered what crime a child like her could have committed to deserve execution. She was possibly a captured runaway slave whose owner had condemned her to the arena to serve as warning to his other slaves.

A dozen wild boars, starved and tormented like the other beasts, were released. Immense creatures they are, about four feet long with huge, tusked heads. Their vicious squeals and grunts could be heard above the screaming of the condemned as the boars cracked their bones and disemboweled them.

I was relieved when the archers and *confectores* had done their work and attendants began clearing the sand of human and animal debris, raking it smooth for the next event. It was a *venatio*, a wild-beast hunt, although 'hunt' is a misnomer. In fact, it's a slaughter of animals by men and other animals.

Perhaps it was the sight of the condemned criminals in the arena, but my thoughts turned to Gaius Quintus. In two weeks, his trial will commence. And at its conclusion he, too, will be a condemned criminal. There's no doubt of that. The evidence against him is overpowering. Who knows that better than I? His crimes are monstrous—murder of his sister, murder of a slave, fraud, and sacrilege. The death of Marcia Renata can be charged to him also. And who were the unfortunates whose horrible deaths I'd just witnessed? What were their crimes? A man who'd struck his master? A woman who'd stolen a scarf or a trinket? They had committed crimes and therefore deserved punishment. But aren't their crimes insignificant in contrast to those of Gaius Quintus? What will be his punishment, then? As much as I detest him, I don't want him chained to a post in the arena. Not after what I've seen today.

The cheers of the crowd disrupted my thoughts of Gaius Quintus. The *editor* and his guests and those in the imperial box returned to their seats, having left the amphitheater to dine elsewhere during the criminal executions. Now the animal hunt could begin.

Twenty or so forest deer were forced through a small door into the arena. The frightened, bewildered animals clustered together close to the door in protective herd instinct. Three animal handlers, the *magistri*, armed with whips and torches, drove the deer out into the middle of the arena where they remained huddled together. The *magistri* released six huge cats which trotted toward the deer, tails lashing. Within minutes, each lion had taken down a deer and carried it away to eat it. The remaining deer had fled in a group to one side of the area, where the petrified creatures scrambled frantically with their forelegs at the high *podium* wall. Then wolves were released from one side of the arena and wild boars from the other, about fifty of them altogether, I'd guess, and all fighting for their share of the prey.

When the bears entered, they hesitated, then incited by hunger and the blood-scent, charged into the bloody melee. There must have been more than a hundred maddened, screaming beasts ripping each other to shreds. No doubt the imperial box members were offended by the stench of blood and entrails because archers began killing those animals still alive and attendants placed pots of burning incense close to the box.

An army of attendants hauled the dead beasts away while others raked the sand for the next event. So far, I'd enjoyed the *venatio* but a large number of ostriches being pursued by *venatores* armed with spears left me indifferent. However, I was quite amazed at how fast an ostrich can run. Their strange wobbling gait is equal to a horse's speed, I'm sure! One wounded ostrich turned on its tormentor and slashed him open from throat to crotch with its immense clawed foot. The spectators, slightly bored with the show, like me, cheered loudly for the bird.

The gladiators returned, now two pairs fighting at the same time. The final contest of the day

was six Samnites facing an equal number of net men. It was a *munera sine missione* combat in which the losers had no right of appeal for clemency. In such a contest a fighter could find himself against two or more opponents.

After some twenty minutes of furious battle, a solitary *retiarius* faced two Samnite swordsmen. Leading them a chase among the bodies strewing the sand, with a sudden cast he snared one of the Samnites. This brought a roar of encouragement from the spectators, most of whom were probably supporting the under-dog, as I was. We booed as the other Samnite slashed the net free with his blade. Armed with only his trident, the *retiarius* fought with determination, stabbing at his foes, and weaving and dodging their swords. He wounded one of them with a jab in the upper leg, followed by a swinging blow to the Samnite's helmet. The wounded man staggered and fell back while his colleague attacked the net man, but almost at once he rejoined the battle. For a few more minutes the two swordsmen hacked and thrust at the nimble net man. But he was faltering with fatigue. It would soon be over.

Then the trumpet blared, the signal to cease combat. A herald stood before the *editor* and announced that the three survivors were declared *stantes missi*. For their bravery and stamina all three were to receive the laurel crown. I cheered along with the rest of the crowd, but I think most of us were shouting for the valor of the lone *retiarius*.

It was early in the eleventh day hour when I left the amphitheater of Statilius Taurus. I was fifteen *denarii* out of pocket for having bet on too many losers. I won't tell Petronia. She's a little 'near' when it comes to money, and I wouldn't wish to upset her frugal nature. I'd had a most enjoyable day at the games. It most certainly beat those fatuous Greek comedies.

But, as I walked home, I kept seeing the Thracian gladiator saluting us with dignity at the moment of his death.

CHAPTER XXXIII

The trial of Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus began this morning at the start of the fourth hour in the law court of the Basilica Julia. The entire central nave had been reserved, an area of about sixteen thousand square feet. When courts are in session, three or four trials are usually in progress at the same time. And because the areas are separated only by pillars, spectators in one area might well listen in fascination to the oration of an advocate at a different trial a hundred feet away. But this event was too important to share the law court with lesser hearings.

In the center of a long dais the presiding *praetor* sat in his ivory chair of office. To either side of him, the iudices sat in three rows—patricians in front, knights in the second row and in the back, thirty-five freemen representing the tribes of Rome. A lower platform ran full length in front of the dais. Here the advocates and witnesses would play their part, high enough for the spectators to see but not obscuring the *praetor* and panel of judges.

At floor level, about ten feet to the right of the *praetor* was the defense table where sat Gaius Quintus, referred to as 'Florianus' throughout the proceedings, and his advocate Quintus Vibius Crispus. I was surprised at the youthful appearance of Crispus but what surprised me more was seeing Corax the tavern-keeper and another man seated behind them. Both looked self-conscious and ill at ease in their *togae*. Probably character witnesses, I thought.

The prosecution table was to the left of the *praetor*. There sat the *patronus*, the chief prosecutor, Gaius Cassius Longinus, and to either side of him were his two *advocati*, Marcus Servilius Falcula and Gaius Flavius Pusio. As a prosecution witness, I sat behind them, as did the two recently freed shrine slaves, Echonia and Turia.

Six rows of benches faced the dais, reserved for senatorials and magistrates. Behind the benches was standing room for several hundred. I'd guess there were about seven or eight hundred spectators. A detachment of the Urban Cohorts at the entrance barred the crowd outside from pushing into the jammed hall.

After the jury had been sworn in, the trial opened with the reading of the charges. Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus was accused of *parricidium*, *homicidium*, *sacrilegium* and *dolus malus*. The charge of parricide was, of course, the murder of his adoptive sister. Many years ago, parricide referred only to the murder of one's father but now it includes any family member. The homicide charge was for the *janitrix*, the slave Minicia. The murders of these two women within the shrine precinct constituted sacrilege. And the charge of *dolus malus*, fraud with the intent of wrongdoing, concerned the unlawful acquisition and revision of Serena Hateria's will.

The first to speak was the prosecution with the junior advocate Flavius Pusio leading off. All the advocates would speak, and it was the usual procedure for the first to malign the character of the accused, to depict him as a depraved, worthless, evil creature. This was meant to give the jury a mind-set to influence them in their adjudication of the foul conduct of the accused, the unspeakable details of which would be set forth shortly by the chief prosecutor.

Prior to speaking, advocates request a specific time period for their oration, measured by a *clepsydra*, a water clock of twenty minutes duration. Pusio had asked for and been granted three *clepsydrae*. He had some sixty minutes in which to vilify the accused in every possible manner from a recital of provable fact to malevolent insinuation. The second advocate will probably request the same time and the chief prosecutor, Cassius, no doubt will request at least six water clocks. Crispus, in defense, will surely ask for at least the same time granted the prosecution. Add the time it'll take to question the witnesses by both sides, and I'd say this trial will take two

days at the least.

Pusio strode majestically to the center of the platform and bowed to the presiding magistrate and the jurors. A sturdy man about my age, in his early thirties, he wore the knight's narrow purple stripe on his tunic. Handsome in a rough-hewn style, he has a great hawk nose which reminds me of Titus Flavius Vespasianus, the young officer I'd met at the Vestals' funeral in the forum. And Pusio is of the *gens Flavia* also. Perhaps a commanding profile is a Flavian trait.

Staring pointedly at Gaius Quintus from his raised position on the platform, Pusio then turned his back to him and walked slowly away in silence. Suddenly he spun around, pointed at the accused, and shouted in a voice that could be heard outside the building, "Look at him! Look at him, honored judges! This man appears before you on charges so abominable, so vile, so evil it makes the bile rise in one's throat just to think of them! Look at him! And ponder on the unspeakable things he has done. Not only the violation of the laws of Rome and his displayed contempt for the welfare of its people but also his impious, blaspheming desecration of the shrine of Vesta, monumental in its arrogant disdain for the goddess who watches over the hearth of Rome! Yes, we have done our best to atone, honored judges, to purify that which was profaned, to assure the gods of our piety, and we pray that our action has been accepted by the divine beings. But, fellow citizens, have the gods forgiven us? We hope so, but we do not know! And if at some future time Rome and its people are punished by some catastrophe too hideous to conjecture, we will know who brought it upon us. Look at him! Mark him well, the murderer and blasphemer, Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus!"

His thunderous opening denunciation had hooked both judges and spectators and he knew it. Now that he held their attention, Pusio spoke in a relaxed style which seemed appropriate to the slurring, malignant innuendo which marked the passage of his three-*clepsydra* exposure of the accused's past. He followed the peripatetic manner of oration, walking slowly to and fro, stopping only to gesture when stressing a point. Several times the spectators cheered and applauded but this was more in admiration of his gifted tongue than in agreement with his discourse. A Roman crowd appreciates excellent rhetoric; it doesn't really matter so much what is said as how cleverly the orator weaves his words. I think it was Cicero who said that an advocate's argument far outweighs the testimony of a witness.

I can't quote in detail all of Pusio's oration, but this is the essence of what he said. He began with the circumstances of the accused's youth. Born into a respectable knightly family and adopted at age eight by a noble household. Such favorable position offered him every privilege, with his adoptive consular father being the most renowned orator of his day and a good friend of Augustus Caesar and his wife Livia. And did this most fortunate of youths, who lacked for nothing, appreciate his circumstances? Did he approach the many doors that were open to him with constructive intent, with the high-minded goal of ascending the *cursus honorum*, the path of honor toward statesmanship and the discharge of his patrician responsibilities to the empire? No. He did no such thing! The obligations inherent in his revered family name meant nothing to this self-centered, arrogant youth.

Very well. It can be said that not all privileged men are inclined or suited to be magistrates, governors, or officials of the state. True. But such men seek other paths which lead to the enhancement of the state and the common good—the arts, religion, architecture, public works, and scholasticism, those many fields which they sponsor and encourage—and even practice themselves should they possess the gift. None this, however, was for Florianus, oh no! So, to the despair of his adoptive father and sister, he squandered his youth away in the company of strutting carousers.

Then he had the opportunity of redeeming himself when, through the influence of his family, he was appointed a *contubernalis* and designated to join the staff of the renowned Germanicus Caesar, commander of the army of the Rhine. Could a cadet aspire to a more advantaged position than this? I tell you, honored judges, he could not! And I speak as one who has served in the legions of Rome. But this was lost upon Florianus. The discipline of army life, the thought of campaigning in the provinces far from the luxury of Rome, the thought of having to face an enemy in battle—all these are the fears of a coward. And it seems they were his fears also because his slothful ways, his disrespect to seniors and his arrogance toward juniors made it quite plain he had no intention of remaining a military man. In short, he was released from the army as unsuitable while still doing his basic training in Rome. Oh yes, the defense advocate might well tell us the poor lad was released by the army on medical grounds. And the official record might even attest to that. But we all know that when a man as respected as his adoptive father is involved, there might well be an act of kindness to prevent a scandal and protect the family name. And some of those who served briefly with Florianus might tell you the facts.

While the third water clock dripped away the minutes, Pusio told of the one million *sesterces* given to Florianus by his adoptive father when the boy was enrolled in the *ordo equestris*—though he'd long since been stricken from the knightly order—and of the half million left him in old Haterius' will only three years ago. He told of the twenty-five thousand *sesterces* annual allowance granted by Haterius when the old gentleman realized his adoptive son was never going to change and dismissed him from the house. He described the wanton squandering of Florianus' fortune on profligate pursuits and shady investments. In conclusion, he elaborated on the squalor to which Florianus had sunk from his former life, living in shabby tenements, consorting with dubious characters, in debt to moneylenders. Until, of course, his adoptive sister's will provided handsomely for him.

When Pusio had finished, the character of the accused had been ravaged beyond repair, at least if you were to accept the advocate's slander at face value. But such courtroom tactics are common practice and I doubt the jurymen were entirely swept away by the vindictive rhetoric. Yet I couldn't help feeling at Pusio had damaged the accused, going by the expression on many of the judges.



A senator's broad stripe marked the tunic of the second advocate, Servilius Falcula. Perhaps ten years older than Pusio, his style was less theatrical; no thundering denunciation of the accused or obsequious appeals to the judges. Whereas his predecessor's task was to depict the accused as capable of every crime known to man, Falcula's oration had a more direct purpose—to prove the accused guilty of specific crimes.

Of the formal charges, Falcula told the jury he would address the matter of fraud first, it being the crime that led to the other acts of parricide, homicide, and sacrilege.

"This, judges," he said, holding aloft a few sheets of parchment for the jury and spectators to see, "is a letter written by the priestess Marcia Renata. She wrote it only a few minutes before she committed suicide, just before sunrise on the day before the *idus* of August. It is a letter to her parents. It is an unhappy and dismaying letter, and it disheartens me to read it to you. But judges, read it I must for it is essential to this trial. It is read with the consent of the parents of Marcia Renata and of the *pontifex maximus*, Tiberius Caesar under whose *potestas* the priestess lived."

As the advocate began to read, for a moment I was transported back to Marcia's chamber in the House of the Vestals, reading the letter I'd found in her table drawer. Word by word, I read it in pace with Falcula. To my ears, his voice was not his own but that of a grief-stricken woman. The spell was broken by the reaction of jury and spectators when the advocate finished reading. The absolute silence in the court while he had read aloud the letter became a discordant outburst of indignation. The *praetor* waited a moment or two, then raised his hand to command silence and nodded to the advocate to continue.

"You have heard, judges, a voice from the tomb telling how a young woman was terrified and threatened by Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus, how she met him at the temple of Saturn and was coerced by him to do his bidding or otherwise have her beloved father and her family name disgraced. You might say she shouldn't have been so foolish as to think that such a despicable man as Florianus could possibly accuse her respected father of a criminal act and be believed. But she was not like you, judges, you who have experienced the harsh realities of our imperfect world. She was a priestess of Vesta dedicated to the welfare of Rome and its people, a woman sheltered from the corruption and degradation all to common to marketplace and back streets. She had lived the restricted life of a Vestal Virgin from her childhood and had little opportunity to encounter the malice and deception that governs the lives of such as Florianus."

I glanced at the defense table where Gaius Quintus stared stony-faced into space. Beside him, his advocate, features bland to the point of boredom, made notes. Corax and his companion wore expressions that said they'd rather be anywhere but here. At Falcula's next statement, Gaius Quintus widened his eyes.

"The priestess Marcia Renata wrote that she met with the accused at the temple of Saturn, as you have heard," Falcula said. "There is no reason not to believe her, but should there be doubt in anyone's mind, we will present a witness to that meeting who will testify that it indeed took place."

Falcula then examined in detail the matter of Serena's will. There should be no doubt, he reassured the jury, that the will had been given to Florianus. Had not the priestess Marcia confessed to the fact and later, despondent with guilt over the consequences of her deed, taken her own life? And why had the accused kept the will three days before returning it? Three days was long enough for a skillful forgery to be done. Forgers in Rome? Hah! Go to certain sections of the city and cast a stone in any direction. Chances are you'll strike a forger.

He then held up a cylindrical parchment container for all to see. This, he told the jury, is the will I refer to. Too long for me to read to you, fifteen pages in all. But it is the sixth page that concerns us, the page that bears the bequest to Florianus. He read that part aloud. Exclaiming over this handsome sum, five times the financial qualification for a member of the senate, he wondered why the priestess Serena Hateria would leave such wealth to an adoptive brother who had broken her father's heart and disgraced the family.

Yes, he allowed, perhaps she had indeed left Florianus some token amount; in fact, this was probable. Why? Because although everything pointed to the will having been tampered with, undoubtedly only the sixth page had been changed. An insertion added to this page would have necessitated the forger's altering the succeeding pages also, which in turn would have required the forging of the seven witnessing signatures and relocating their wax seals. A risky business, indeed! Instead, the forger had only to replace the sixth page, merely changing the amount of the bequest in the space already provided.

But of what use is a bequest when the maker of the will still lives? he asked. In this case we have a woman who was in good health and with many years ahead of her. A most unhappy

prospect for a beneficiary plagued by financial woes. Falcula referred to the deplorable condition to which Florianus had fallen, as so ably described earlier by his fellow advocate, Pusio. He led the judges along the trail the accused had followed to ensure that his bequest would materialize, ending in the foul murder of his adoptive sister before the sacred altar of Vesta.

"And," he concluded as his third water clock ran out, "before she died, the Vestal Virgin Serena Hateria recognized her killer!"

It was close to the end of the sixth hour when the *praetor* adjourned the trial until the start of the ninth, at which time the chief prosecutor would appear, having been granted six *clepsydrae*.



One of Rome's eminent jurists, Gaius Cassius Longinus is not an orator of the dramatic, spell-binding school who employs thundering rhetoric and theatrical posturing to accent his argument, or to cloud the more contentious issues. His presentation is direct, erudite, and spoken in clear, positive diction which says, 'I'm not here to entertain and awe you. I'm going to lay the hard, cold facts in your lap.'

In the eyes of many, he bears the stigma of being the descendent and namesake of that Cassius who was the chief instigator of Julius Caesar's assassination. Perhaps because of that, he's shunned stagy histrionics and created for himself an image of conservative reliability.

His juniors having described in detail the dissolute past of the accused and establishing his motive for murder, Cassius proceeded directly to the murders. From the testimony of a shrine servant, it was deduced that the priestess and *janitrix* had been murdered between the eighth and eleventh night hours. No doubt, Cassius told the judges, the defense advocate will produce witnesses to swear the accused was a hundred miles away at that particular time. Of course, he will. But, said Cassius, we'll deal with that matter when it arises. During this, he stared fixedly at the hapless Corax and the other man. The murderer wasn't just some citizen who meandered in from the street, was he? No, he was someone who knew the physical plan of the shrine and the House of the Vestals and of the routines carried out by the priestesses and shrine servants.

I recalled the scene in front of the altar as Cassius described the death of Serena Hateria, the dagger thrust into her upper back and side, the letters 'GAI' written by her in her own blood on the altar front. He asked the judges to imagine the horror that had seized Marcia Renata when she found her sister priestess and dearest friend murdered in the shrine, the utter despair that led her to take her own life.

"The crime scene I have described was witnessed by four people, not including the undertakers of the temple of Libitina, but I shall call only one to testify. The others, who are willing to appear should it be necessary, are the lady Cornelia, Chief Vestal; the prefect Sutorius Macro, and the tribune Caelius Ballista." Cassius paused to let jury and spectators reflect on the stature of such witnesses.

"I ask you to consider the final act of the Vestal Serena Hateria, judges. In the last minutes of her life, she inscribed in her own blood the three letters 'G,' 'A,' 'T' and the start of a fourth. I have a true copy of her inscription which you may examine later. Again, witnessed by those persons I have already mentioned. But what could the letters 'GAI' mean? Could that woman have been trying to write the name of her murderer as she lay dying before the altar she had tended all her life? What else? And could 'GAI' be the first three letters of 'Gaius'? And try, if you will, to think of how few words in our language begin with those letters. Yes, judges, pure reason tells us she was trying to name her killer and that 'Gaius' is that uncompleted name!"

With one of his few physical gestures, Cassius held out one arm to the jurymen and the other toward the spectators. "How of you have the *praenomen* 'Gaius'?" he asked. "A rhetorical question, of course. I'd guess that perhaps a quarter of you do. The most common name there is. Why, I myself am a 'Gaius'!" Another of his pauses, allowing his listeners to wonder where all this was leading. "But," he continued, "how many men in Rome named 'Gaius' also had an adoptive sister who was a Vestal Virgin? How many of them obtained that sister's will through intimidation and retained it for three days? How many of them received a substantial bequest when that sister died an untimely death? I can think of one man only--Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus!"

Cassius described the finding of the two bodies by the Chief Vestal soon after sunrise, the dagger embedded in the breast of Marcia Renata. At first it was thought both women had been murdered, until the delayed discovery of Marcia Renata's letter. Cassius observed that both Vestals had pointed the finger of accusation at Florianus in writing, one with carefully measured words on parchment and the other with blood on the altar of Vesta. As for Marcia Renata's suggestion that possibly she had been the intended victim of the murderer, Cassius dismissed this as most improbable. Regardless of the gloom of the shrine, if Serena Hateria could recognize her killer, then surely he would have known her also. And who is to say the murderer wasn't aware that Serena was acting as *sacricola* priestess in Marcia's place that night? What had passed between the unfortunate *janitrix* and the murderer before she was slain by him? A guileless young slave girl, the doorkeeper Minicia, would no doubt have answered any questions put to her by someone posing authoritatively. Her reward, of course, was to die at age seventeen, her blood staining the forecourt of the House of the Vestals.

His oration concluded in the same unemotional manner that Cassius had displayed throughout. "I see that my allotted time is up, judges. You have listened thoughtfully to the words of my colleagues and myself. You have learned of the circumstances and history of the murdered priestess and her adoptive brother. You have heard the evidence. You are loyal, honorable, and able citizens, otherwise you would not be sitting here in judgment. I accuse Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus of committing parricide, homicide, sacrilege, and fraud. I ask you to put aside passion and in the name of justice find the accused guilty."

CHAPTER XXXIV

Troubled dreams plagued my sleep last night, possibly caused by yesterday's trial and my apprehension about testifying as a witness today or tomorrow. There was a light drizzle, so Macro sent for a litter to carry us to the basilica. He must have sensed my feelings because he said, "You'll do well, m'boy. And if that baby-faced advocate gives you a bad time, Cassius can call upon me to support your testimony." I grinned at him with assurance I didn't feel.

The prosecution had run through twelve water clocks and the defense advocate was granted the same time. Were he to speak continuously, he'd go well past the midday sun. But Crispus wasn't foolish. A panel of judges with stomachs growling in hunger wouldn't give full heed to an advocate's argument after listening to the same voice for four hours. By arrangement with the magistrate Crispus divided his oration into two periods of six water clocks each, the first ending early in the sixth hour, followed by a break for the midday meal. Thinking on it, I see his cleverness. The main thrust of his argument would be made to jurymen in a good frame of mind with full bellies and who had had time to ponder his opening oration.

Crispus bowed to the *praetor* and the judges seated at either side of him, then faced the three prosecuting advocates and inclined his head respectfully, a small courtesy that none of them had given him. He turned to the spectators—again, something that the prosecutors hadn't done—smiled politely as he scanned the crowd from left to right, then bowed to them. I think he was intentionally letting the spectators observe him as a clean-cut youth, courteous and at ease in his snowy toga and wearing the purple stripe of a knight. If so, it worked. A murmur of approval rippled through the spectators in the standing room only section. It was beneath the dignity of the seated notables to display emotion. The advocate Pusio, seated in front of me, snorted in disdain.

"I am Quintus Vibius Crispus, judges," he began, "and I speak on behalf of Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus. Most of you don't know me and no doubt wonder why I am in the role of advocate for the accused. Surely there are a hundred more experienced men, older men more worthy of the task, you may think. If you do reflect on this, then yes, there are many advocates who were arguing before the courts before I was born. Judges, please look at the prosecuting advocates for a moment."

Crispus paused momentarily while the jurymen obeyed him and stared at our table. "What you see, judges, is more than fifty collective years of experience in the law. Fifty years." Again, the pause while the judges returned their gaze to him. Softly, yet loud enough to be heard by the farthest spectator, he said "Judges, I have not quite two years."

Every eye in the silent hall was upon him as he walked slowly along the platform a few paces. "Then why am I here? This is the answer: none of the men of experience, the learned men of law, would undertake the defense of Florianus. That's right. None! But I dare say most of those worthies beseeched the gods to favor them with appointment to the prosecutor's table! Why? Again, I'll answer my own question. Because this trial has aroused more public interest than any other since Cicero's defense of Annius Milo. A murder in the shrine of Vesta stimulates the concern of every Roman. Because of the appalling nature of the crime and its attendant sacrilege, the entire populace cries out for vengeance, for the criminal to be punished!" He hesitated. "And rightly so, judges!"

I was intrigued by this young man and found myself listening to him more intently than to the other advocates. He was master of the dramatic pause, effecting it without any suggestion of contrivance. He did so now, then queried the jurymen in an easy conversational tone.

"Gentlemen, do you know how many murders there were within the fourteen urban districts of Rome in the last year? Two thousand, seven hundred and fifty-one. That's the number we know of officially. Of these, one hundred and fifty-four, about one in twenty, resulted in criminal charges. Less than half of those led to convictions. Should you question my figures, judges, there is a respected prefect present whose official records will confirm them." He bent his neck respectfully toward Macro, who sat expressionless in the front row of the privileged spectators.

"So, judges, of every forty murders committed, only one ends in a conviction and thirty-nine remain unresolved. But..." Another pause as his eyes swept the three tiers of jurymen. "...on some occasions public outrage demands retribution. And this is such an occasion. It is the one murder in forty which must be resolved because it involves sacrilege in the shrine of that goddess who is revered and honored daily in every Roman household from the most lordly to the most humble. The collective passion of the people cried out 'Find the criminal!' And when indeed someone is accused, the passion is fired anew. 'Now that we've found him let him be punished!' Judges, consider that for a moment."

Every person in the hushed basilica watched the young man walking slowly along the platform as though deep in thought, before turning again to the judges. "Can anyone deny that the very circumstances of this trial suffuse it with emotion? Can anyone deny that emotion is the antithesis of logic, that it stifles clear thought? And, judges, reasoning not based upon logic is irrational, unsound, and it certainly has no place in a law court of Rome. '*Ius est ars boni et aequi.*' You well know the expression, judges, but it bears repeating: law is the art of the good and just! When you accepted empanelment as jurymen you openly declared to yourselves and to the public that you deem yourselves good and just men. That means, gentlemen, you sit here in judgement without prejudice. *Nihil praeiudicati adferre.* You have not already judged this case."

For a moment, I thought Crispus had turned to stare at me, then realized he was looking at Pusio just in front of me.

"I am pleased you are free of prejudice, for a relentless, vicious attack on the character of the accused was made by the opening advocate with the sole purpose of influencing you against Florianus. The advocate's theatrical presentation consisted of vile slander, half-truths, fanciful conjecture, and contemptible innuendo. He was openly doing his utmost to plant the seeds of prejudice among you to dissipate the logical thought that is integral to good and just men. I have faith that his corrupting seeds will not germinate."

Turning from us, Crispus moved to the center of the platform from where he could be seen readily by both groups of jurymen. "The prosecution has argued its case in three parts. First there was the assault upon the character of the accused, the prejudicial intent of which I have mentioned. The second prosecutor referred to motive and read aloud to you an excerpt from a will. Not the entire contents of the will, but only one small excerpt!"

Crispus employed his tactical pause once more, eyeing the judges with an expression that said, "Strange, isn't it? Perhaps we should look further into this."

"The third advocate completed the argument by telling you that the accused must be guilty because the murdered priestess recognized her killer and wrote his name, or part of it, on the side of the altar. Very well, I shall respond to the three sections in the same sequence."

I am able to quote Crispus with reasonable accuracy because I transcribed his argument in the shorthand technique designed many years ago by the renowned Tullius Cicero's servant and scribe, Tiro. With all due respect to his memory, actually I've made substantial improvements to his system. I wish to keep a transcript of the trial because I'm a party to it; whereas the prosecution advocates will no doubt have their arguments transcribed by professional copyists

for public sale, a common practice with the more eminent *advocati*. I'm not so sure the unknown Vibius Crispus will be similarly treated by the commercial book sellers. But a twelve *clepsydrae* oration is too much to repeat verbatim, so I'll offer the essence of it as I've done with the others.

Crispus dealt with Pusio's character denigration point by point. Yes, he agreed, Florianus had enjoyed an enviable position when a youth and upon assuming the toga of manhood he hadn't set out to pursue the path of honor. He was not cut out for the magisterial vocation, as the prosecuting advocate agrees is the case with many men. And although a knight by birth and financially endowed by his adoptive patrician family, he was not wealthy by any means. Comfortable, yes, but not rich by the standards of those men mentioned by the prosecutor who channel their interests toward the public good in its many aspects. Hardly in a position to be a patron of the arts. As for the strutting carousers with whom the accused squandered away his youth, or so says Pusio, who were they? Pusio is rich in rhetoric, emotional rhetoric, but he appears destitute in detail. If Pusio is unable to name the youthful corrupters of Florianus, then Crispus is quite able to do so. But he will not unless pressed by the court. Suffice it to say that two of those evil companions of the accused in days gone by are members of the jury in this trial. 'Good men, just men,' Crispus said, staring directly at Pusio.

Pusio had made much of the accused's short-lived military service, hadn't he? To the point of accusing the army of falsifying an official document. Pusio suggests that the officer corps of the army is only too happy to accommodate the dignity of a respected citizen by shielding his family name from notoriety. How disconcerting this is! And Pusio talks of being a former legionary officer himself. Is he indeed privy to malfeasance in the military administration? If so, then let him act upon it and bring it into the open as any good and just man would do. Or were his words mere innuendo, an attempt to prejudice this court?

Crispus removed a document from the *sinus* of his toga. This, he said, is a certified copy of the army discharge for Florianus. It states that he was released because of an incurable condition of *dyspnoea*, attested to by two army surgeons and signed by a tribune who at present is commanding Legion Six Ferrata in Syria. And, judges, for the record, Florianus was discharged in Moesia while serving on the staff of Poppaeus Sabinus and not in Rome while still under basic training. Nor was he ever designated for the staff of Germanicus Caesar. For a former military officer, Pusio doesn't appear to have checked his facts too well.

And should the judges be swayed by Pusio's contention that the army release of Florianus was a fraudulent act, that a present serving legionary commander and two *medici* were liars, then they would be interested in another document produced by Crispus. It was a certificate signed by two eminent medical practitioners here in Rome and attesting that Florianus suffers from acute asthma, exactly as diagnosed some years ago by the conniving, irresponsible army surgeons of Pusio's fantasy. As Crispus handed the documents to the court clerk, he commented to the judges that several of them would undoubtedly accept the medical testimony observing that they had entrusted their own health and that of their families to the same two *medici* for many years.

How the jurymen were reacting to Crispus thus far was hard to say, their features sober and reflective in keeping with their role. But the spectators in the standing section had been captured by the spunky young advocate who, outnumbered three to one, was dishing it out to the prosecution with spirit and vigor. Only two water clocks had expired but several times the hall and rung with applause and shouts of approval. The crowd was not only admiring his polished rhetoric but also his logical argument. Young Crispus had obviously been doing his homework while most of Rome had been lost in the Games. Observing his effective demolition of Pusio, I didn't look forward to being examined by him.

Crispus completed his dissection of Pusio half-way through his third water clock, having turned the prosecutor's scathing castigation of the accused into a haughty denunciation of most of Rome's populace, the unworthy wretches who live in crowded tenements and strive to eke out a living. Crispus knew, of course, that the judges, good and just men, wouldn't have the same supercilious attitude toward the stalwart citizenry which served in Rome's legions and were the very lifeblood of its commerce. The spectators loved it, and several were ejected from the basilica by the magistrate's lictors when they shouted insults at Pusio. While order was being restored, Crispus spoke briefly with his client, drank a cup of water, and returned to the platform.

He began the second part of his argument. "I shall move on now, judges, to the matter of the letter written by the priestess Marcia Renata. Florianus and I accept this letter *ex bona fide*, not wishing to waste your time with the suggestion that it is a forgery, although the prosecution has assured us that the city teems with forgers. Yes, we accept the letter as having been written by the priestess. But we do not accept its statements. The prosecution accepts it *verbatim et litteratum* and presents it as the core of their argument."

Another significant pause, then, "I suggest to you, judges, that the priestess Marcia Renata incriminated the accused for a crime that she knew he hadn't committed!"

This last was almost shouted by Crispus, followed by a murmur from the spectators. "Allow me to quote from her letter, gentlemen. 'I am certain Gaius Quintus killed her or had someone else kill her because of the will.' Yes, she was certain in her belief, but how could she know unless she had witnessed the deed? Her certainty is based on conjecture, not solid fact. But I believe that she did know who had murdered Serena Hateria. And is it possible that her incrimination of Florianus wasn't more positive because she knew guilt over her false accusation? Her letter doesn't mention an inscription on the altar front. Perhaps she hadn't noticed it. Yes, but perhaps that inscription did not exist at the time she wrote her letter."

He turned to the prosecution table with a polite nod. "The letter tells of a meeting with Florianus at the temple of Saturn and the prosecution says there was a witness to this. I presume one of the ladies seated behind the prosecutor is that witness. If so, I suggest that she may be dismissed because my client does not deny such a meeting. It's the subject matter of the meeting which is in dispute. The priestess tells a story about Serena Hateria's will. But, judges, my client had no need whatsoever to see the will. He knew full well what it contained with respect to himself. His adoptive sister had long since informed him of his bequest of five million *sesterces*. She had told him also that she would probably outlive him and would pass the money to him when she had completed her term of office in the shrine, some seven years hence. And she had recently instituted an annual allowance of twenty-five thousand *sesterces* for him, one which had lapsed on the death of his adoptive father three years ago."

Crispus asked the judges why a woman would leave a substantial bequest to an adoptive brother with whom she was allegedly not on good terms and grant him a respectable annual allowance. It may seem small coin to the monied classes, but look upon that allowance as the man on the street would, about ten times the sum a skilled tradesman would earn in a year. Yes, Florianus had known business failure and poverty and openly admits his past errors in judgement. But he's a proud man who's determined to win back his rightful status through hard work. This was the reason for his adoptive sister's help. She wished to free him from the misery of poverty and offer him the opportunity to prove his worth. From all he'd learned about Serena Hateria, Crispus said, she appeared to have been a woman of good business sense. She was not ready to give him a grant or loan of any large sum until he had proven to her he'd learned a lesson in handling money. But she did know, as Vergilius Maro tells us, *facilis descensus*

Averno—that the descent to hell is easy but it's very difficult to climb back up.

He picked up two sets of documents from the clerk's table. "I have here, judges, the will of Serena Hateria and the letter written by Marcia Renata, evidence introduced by the prosecutor. The advocate Falcula suggested the will was too lengthy to read in its entirety, and I agree with him, so he read to you only that entry on the sixth page concerning the bequest to Florianus. Allow me to read to you another excerpt from the will. It is on the fifth page, and I quote: 'To my dearest friend and sister in Vesta, Marcia Renata, I leave ten million *sesterces* and the Hateria family villa located in Herculaneum.' I might add that the priestess left bequests to one hundred and forty-eight persons and organizations, with the residue of her estate going to the imperial privy purse. The bequests total close to thirty-five million *sesterces* and the entire estate was valued in excess of two hundred million. So, judges, you can see that many people were named in the will, including the priestess, Marcia Renata."

Returning the will to the clerk, Crispus held up the other document. "The letter of Marcia Renata, judges. You have been read the entire contents so I will not repeat them. However, I wish to invite your attention to something. The priestess writes, 'I have sinned and am no longer worthy of being a priestess of Vesta.' Just what was the sin she claims to have committed? She refers to the breaking of her trust as custodian of the wills. Remember now, judges, she writes as a priestess, one who fully comprehends the nature of sin in the theological sense. And she most certainly was aware that the offence she described is *not* a sin. Her custodianship was not a religious undertaking, it was merely a long-standing traditional service offered by the shrine and had absolutely nothing to do with the veneration of Vesta! But she uses the word 'sin.' Had she indeed committed a true sin, one that weighed so heavily upon her that she took her own life in despair, in atonement? A sin which she couldn't bring herself to name in writing and for which she substituted a lesser offence?"

Again, Crispus paused while he scanned the faces of the jurymen. "If my words bewilder you, let me clarify them. The 'lesser' offence I allude to is her statement that she broke her trust by giving the will to Florianus. We refute this. He had no reason to see the will. But I suggest that she was concerned over the matter of Serena Hateria's will for a far different reason. One which led to the commission of a true sin rather than something that was at most a civil offence."

He had the entire assembly absorbed—judges, spectators, the prosecution and certainly me, Sutorius Anthus. "But gentlemen, my time for this morning has run out. This afternoon I shall tell you why the subject of the will and Marcia Renata bears examination." The clever bastard ensured our interest by leaving us dangling.

It was at the start of the sixth hour when the *praetor* ordered the court to reconvene in our hour's time, probably hoping an early midday start would see the trial over by late afternoon. I went around the corner to a hot-food shop in the Street of the Tuscans but should have saved my money. I couldn't eat; my stomach was knotted with apprehension over my approaching testimony and examination by Crispus. He was far cleverer than Pusio and at least as capable as the two older prosecutors. When I took my seat again, I knew someone else shared my anxiety. Corax looked gray with trepidation. Our eyes met across the floor, and I knew he was trying to recall where we'd met before.

"I told you that I would clarify my interest in the will of Serena Hateria and the actions of Marcia Renata," Crispus opened. "But first let me tell you why my client met with Marcia Renata that day two months ago. Florianus had visited his adoptive sister twice in the preceding week. They discussed family matters and Florianus was given ten thousand *sesterces* in recompense for some personal things he had attended to on her behalf. On both occasions she

didn't appear well, but seemed fatigued and troubled. Now, he knew that she was carrying out the duties of the Chief Vestal who was absent from the city on family business and he learned also that the priestess Marcia Renata was ill. This meant the shrine was attended to by only four priestesses, two of whom were young novices. Yet he felt his sister's condition was caused by something deeper than the pressure of her extra duties and this gave him concern. I mentioned that Marcia Renata wasn't well and, in fact, about that time she was taken from the House of the Vestals to be treated in a private infirmary where she remained for several days. Three or four days after he'd last seen his sister, Florianus called at the Vestal residence early one evening, anxious about her health. But the doorkeeper, a young slave, told him the lady Serena was resting and couldn't be disturbed. This increased his concern and so a couple of days later he sent a note to Marcia Renata, requesting that she meet him. Knowing the lady Marcia was his sister's friend of many years, he wished to discuss with her his sister's health. Which they did. He noted at the time that Marcia Renata appeared pallid and somewhat spiritless, but he attributed this to her recent illness. When they parted, she promised to send him a letter advising what she had learned about Serena and possibly meet with him again. He never saw her after that, nor received any communication."

Once more the pause, heavy with meaning, with everyone waiting intently for what came next. His strategically placed silences were as powerful a weapon in his argument as any clever rhetorical turn of phrase.

"Nor received any communication!" he repeated forcefully. "Including the will of his adoptive sister. And furthermore, judges, the priestess Marcia Renata would not have given him that will, nor anyone else, because she would never have allowed anyone the opportunity to tamper with it! Nor do I imply that devotion to duty stood between her and the malfeasance. What I mean is that the will was a tool in her hands, the means by which she could protect her family's honor!"

The courtroom buzzed with speculation at his words and the three prosecutors looked at one another in bewilderment. Pusio, who lacks my esteem, turned to me with a glance suggesting this was all my fault.

"The honor of her family appeared to be very much on her mind," Crispus went on. "Her concern for it is the reason she gives in her letter for submitting to the alleged demand of Florianus for his sister's will. And now, judges, I must disclose with much reluctance something which is material to my argument. I say 'with reluctance' because I would rather not have to introduce the matter. My renowned colleagues at the prosecutor's table will agree, I am sure, that at times an advocate is placed in the unhappy position of deliberating upon a disagreeable subject. Yet he must because it's in the pursuit of justice. What I'm about to tell you is already known, at least in part, to some members of the jury but it is something, judges, that all of you should know. It is this: Marcus Renatus Livius, the father of the priestess Marcia Renata, had been beset by severe financial problems in recent times. For several years he and other family members have formed a consortium which administered their diverse holdings. But over the last decade the Renati fortunes have suffered for several reasons. Pompeius Magnus may have cleared our sea of pirates a hundred years ago, but that was then, and this is now, and piracy is again on the rise. Just ask the Renati who have lost numerous vessels and their costly cargoes, often within sight of our Italian shoreline. Add to that, recent crop failures in Sicily and Egypt—grain is a large investment of the family—and the exhaustion of an iron mine on the island of Ilva. Many such disasters fell upon the family in succession over a few years. It left them impecunious, for the Renata are proud patricians. They honored their debts by selling off their

estates and valuables to meet their creditors..."

The presiding magistrate interrupted. "Vibius Crispus, you have declared that this disclosure is germane to your argument. Assure this court once more that your reference to the Renati misfortunes is necessary."

"*Praetor*, I do so assure you. And I repeat my earlier declaration that it grieves me to do so."

"Then you may continue."

"My point, judges, is that Renati were in a destitute situation. This is not a shameful thing nor is it unique to them. Even the Caesar family of the renowned clan Julia have known bad times in the past. But I suggest that Marcia Renata was the true daughter of a proud patrician family, and it drained her emotionally to see her beloved parents face penury and social humiliation. She had received a dowry from the state of two million *sesterces* when she became a novice in the shrine. During the last twenty years this had increased to five million through sound investment. Even though she was not a member of the family consortium, she gave all of this to her father more than a year ago. It helped to pay out several of the more pressing debts but left many others unsatisfied. How do I know all this? All I can say is that for the last month while Rome rejoiced in the Games to Jupiter, I have been studying public archives and records. Should anyone chide me for seeking out such information, let him be told that the task of an advocate is far more than making clever speeches in the courts. His primary role is the gathering of facts. Facts! Not half-truths and sly innuendo."

At this, Pusio squirmed and muttered. His discomfiture pleased me even though we were on the same team.

"Yes, judges, the priestess's assistance cleared some of her father's debts but not all. Two months ago, he was advised by his creditors that unless they had been paid by the Kalends of September, they would coerce him into bankruptcy. Although his creditors would possibly receive some payment, it meant the loss of *dignitas* and *auctoritas* for the Renati."

Crispus took a square of linen from his toga and carefully wiped his face and neck before facing the jurymen again. "But the honor and dignity of the Renati remains intact, judges!" he proclaimed. "All of their creditors have been paid in full."

Another undertone rippled through the hall as Crispus produced yet another document from the fold of his toga and gave it to the clerk. "I present for the court records a certified copy of the will of Marcia Renata. It's only two pages and I will not read it to you. You may do so yourselves if you wish. It is dated a year ago, about the time she aided her family financially. Other than a few small bequests concerning her funeral rites, her entire estate was left to her father. Now, judges, bear in mind that the death of Marcia Renata was after that of Serena Hateria and therefore she inherited under Serena's will. And, within a matter of hours of Marcia's inheritance, her father inherited from her. He inherited ten million *sesterces* and an estate in Herculaneum which I have since learned has now been sold by him for eighteen million. That, gentlemen, is why the accounts of Marcus Renatus Livius have been settled and the family honor still stands! You might say this was indeed timely and fortuitous for the Renati, apart from the death of Marcia, of course, but I suggest to you that something more than a smile from the goddess Fortuna was involved!"

I was surprised when the young advocate, in a rare display of the dramatic, raised his arms to embrace the jurymen to either side of the magistrate. "You are good and just men. This is a Roman court of law in which prejudice and emotion have no place. And I ask you this: is it not possible the priestess Marcia Renata truly believed the only path to her beloved family's freedom from ignominy was through the death of herself and her friend Serena Hateria? I put it to you,

judges, that she loved her sister priestess, but she loved her family more."

The stunned silence lasted a moment, then the hall erupted as the implication of his words struck home. Even the jurymen chattered excitedly. Garbled cries from the spectators mingled outraged protest and shouts of approval. The young man appeared to have at least half the crowd on his side. I wondered if he'd swayed any of the judges. I caught Macro's eye, and he raised his eyebrows and shrugged as if to say, 'I'll be damned. Now what?'

After order had been restored, Crispus continued. "My comment has raised concern as I knew it would, judges. For I have put before you a repugnant conception, that of one priestess murdering another. I do not say this is so. I postulate that it lies well within the realm of possibility, given the motivation I have described and the events that followed the death of the two priestesses.

"But wait! You will say, 'But what about the murder of the *janitrix*, and the letters written in blood by the dying priestess?' Very well, as for the *janitrix*, her station was at the main entrance to the Vestal residence, close by the door to the passageway leading from the residence *atrium* into the shrine. She would be a witness to anyone entering the shrine. As a young slave servant, she would have gone readily into the forecourt of the residence on the pretext of someone in authority over her. You might remind me that the keys to the main entrance and the wall gate were found in the forecourt with both entries locked. So how could the murderer of the doorkeeper re-enter the residence and later murder Serena Hateria in the shrine? Very easily! A person within the residence could have unbarred the front entrance of the shrine of Vesta beforehand and then, after murdering the doorkeeper, locked the residence door, left through the gate, which was then locked from the outside, and flung the keys over the wall into the forecourt. That person could then have entered through the unbarred shrine entrance and barred it once more when inside. Is all this possible? The answer is yes, judges, it is."

He looked toward the prosecution table. "You see three witnesses seated behind the prosecutors. I suggest that each of them would confirm that which I have described as possible." But I thought he pushed his luck a little when he said, "And I am sure also, judges, that the *virgo vestalis maxima* would agree that such was physically possible."

With three water clocks remaining for his argument, Crispus returned to the matter of Marcia Renata's having written that she had sinned, stressing the point that as a priestess she knew full well what she was stating. Reminding the court that she had been in poor health, he wondered if her brief stay in the private infirmary had indeed been caused by a liver complaint. Or had she yielded to severe stress induced by anguish over her family's misfortunes and the thought of how she might dispel their adversity? Unfortunately, we will never know, because the name of the *medicus* is unknown. The Chief Vestal was absent from the city at the time and has no knowledge. The priestess Serena Hateria undoubtedly knew, of course, but...

Had Marcia Renata's obsession with family problems driven her to the one financial resource she possessed? The bequest in her friend's will? If so, then why would she have tried to incriminate Florianus? The very context of her letter suggests an unbalanced mind. Charging Florianus with making threats that any schoolboy would laugh at. Also, had she murdered her sister priestess, surely no suspicion would have fallen on her and she would have been able to offer the benefits of her bequest to her family.

But, by her own confession, she had sinned. That terrible sin was in all probability the murder of Serena Hateria. Is it possible, if not probable, that such sin would lead her to suicide in terrible remorse at the deed? And if set upon taking her own life in extreme atonement, then why implicate Florianus? Could it be because she was unable to confess to her parents the awful sin

she had committed? Did her personal torment combine with respect for her parents and the wish to protect them from public humiliation?

But why implicate Florianus? Crispus repeated. Marcia Renata knew that he and his adoptive sister hadn't always been on good terms, and she no doubt also knew they had reconciled. But the meeting with Florianus at the temple of Saturn was fresh in her mind. If she was to direct suspicion away from herself, who better than Florianus? She could hardly implicate the City Prefect or First of the Senators. But Florianus was most appropriate. He was someone who had visited the Vestal residence over the years and knew its design, he had experienced business losses recently, and he knew that he was heir to a handsome sum in his adoptive sister's will. Yes, he was an ideal choice.

But you might point out that Serena Hateria wrote the letters 'GAI' upon the altar. In her own blood. Who is to say that she did so? How simple for someone else to have daubed their finger in her blood and made that damning inscription!

His time drawing to a close, Crispus commenced his concluding argument. "You have listened to me carefully, judges, for the duration of twelve *clepsydrae* and I thank you for such courtesy. I have had to present indelicate facts and regret that it was necessary. But necessary it was, and you well know it. I am here to defend Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus against serious charges by the state. Every citizen knows that when a person is accused of a crime the onus is upon his accusers to prove guilt beyond all doubt. But what proof has been laid before you? None! It's a sad depreciation of the law to even say that the prosecution rests its case upon circumstantial evidence. A letter written by a woman now dead—'a voice from the tomb' as Servilius Falcula describes it—is this the kind of evidence upon which a Roman court would condemn a man? And the smearing of my client's character by Flavius Pusio? That tells us more about Pusio, I suggest, than it does of Florianus. It was nothing but a mean-spirited spewing of insignificant trivia which ranged from the accusation that Florianus in his youth reveled with high-spirited companions, some of whom are in this chamber at this very minute, to slanderous innuendo concerning the falsification of army records by respected and proven officers. All of it was an open attempt to prejudice you against the accused.

"A great man of law from our past was also concerned about the malignancy of prejudice within the legal system. I can do no better than quote him. Listen, then, to the words of Marcus Tullius Cicero spoken to a panel of judges almost a century ago. 'Wrongful prejudice will no doubt have its way at public meetings but in courts of law it must be completely impotent. Certainly prejudice will flourish in the minds and words of the uninstructed, but it is the duty of trained intellects to brush it aside. A definition of fair trial was handed down to us by our ancestors and it is something to which we should hold fast: in a law court, guilt must be punished without prejudice. And if there is not guilt, prejudice must not be allowed to rear its head.'

"I ask you, judges, that while you deliberate, you remember Cicero's injunction against preconception and emotion. This is not a public meeting where prejudice has its way, as Cicero said. This is a Roman court of law. As judges, you must ask yourselves, 'What has been proven by irrefutable evidence and what has been based upon hearsay and emotional conjecture?' The renowned jurist Gaius Cassius Longinus has asked you to put aside passion and find the accused guilty. I also, judges, ask you to put aside passion and examine thoroughly the probability that the Vestal Virgin Serena Hateria and the shrine servant Minicia were murdered by someone other than the accused. I ask you to find Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus not guilty."

CHAPTER XXXV

It was well within the ninth hour and following a short interval after the defense argument, the examination of witnesses began. The event I dreaded was about to commence.

Cassius Longinus rose and addressed the court. "The freedwoman Echonis Cornelia, sacristan in the shrine of Vesta, was witness to the meeting between the accused and the priestess Marcia Renata at the temple of Saturn. Because the defense advocate has ceded that such a meeting did occur, I will not present her as a witness." The magistrate nodded in acknowledgment and Cassius continued. "I call upon the freedwoman Turia Cornelia, also a sacristan of the shrine." Turia was sworn in and conducted to the center of the platform.

"Turia Cornelia, you are a freedwoman, formerly a public slave assigned to the House of the Vestals," Cassius said. "You were manumitted four weeks ago by the *pontifex maximus*, Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Nero. Tell the court what your duties were prior to your manumission."

Like myself, the two women had been coached by Cassius concerning their responses. Turia replied in a low voice, "I was the night watch servant, sir."

"Repeat that more loudly. The magistrate and judges must be able to hear you."

"Sir, I was the night watch servant."

"That's better. Now tell us what your duties were."

She described the night watch servant's function chiefly as a fire and security warden, making rounds of the entire residence once an hour. She also called the *sacricola* hourly to ensure the priestess was awake to attend to her shrine duties. An addition, the servant performed any other tasks assigned by the *sacricola*. In response to the prosecutor's question, she said that she'd been a shrine servant for almost twenty-four years and had served in many capacities. The night watch was shared by six senior servants, a month each in rotation. Yes, she had been on duty the night of August the eleventh, the night of the murders and suicide.

"Did you see the priestesses Serena Hateria and Marcia Renata during your hours of duty?" asked Cassius.

"Yes, sir. I went to the lady Serena's chambers during the eighth night hour to call her. She was awake and I accompanied her to the *atrium*. It was then I noticed that the *janitrix* Minicia wasn't at her post by the entrance. I didn't mention this to the lady Serena because I thought the girl had only gone to the washroom or such and would return shortly."

"Was that the last time you saw Serena Hateria?"

"It was, sir. When I went to her chamber the following hour she wasn't there. That didn't alarm me because I assumed she'd already gone to the shrine. In any case I knew she was awake and somewhere in the residence. I was really more concerned about the door-keeper. She was still absent, and I hadn't been able to find her anywhere."

"Then you met Marcia Renata, I believe. When was that?"

"Early in the eleventh hour, sir. I was going to look for the lady Serena again when the lady Marcia came into the entrance hall. I told her I hadn't seen the lady Serena for a couple of hours and the *janitrix* was missing also. She told me not to worry, that there would be some good reason. She said she was resuming her duty as *sacricola* and for me to continue on my rounds. Then she entered the passageway leading into the shrine."

"Did you see her after that?"

"Oh, yes. Early in the twelfth hour I went to her chambers because she'd told me she was

sacricola. Her chamber door was open, sir, and I saw her seated at her table, writing. Satisfied that she was awake, I left quietly. She seemed preoccupied and didn't see me, I'm sure. I continued my rounds. There was still no sign of Minicia. At the start of the first day hour, I called the Chief Vestal, my last duty of the night."

Cassius dismissed Turia and addressed the judges. "I called this witness to establish that the murders of Serena Hateria and the servant Minicia occurred during the period between the start of the eighth night hour and the end of the tenth. It confirms also that Marcia Renata entered the shrine in the eleventh hour and was observed later, near the start of the last night hour in her chambers, writing. There can be no doubt that she was writing the letter of which you are all aware."

It was now the defense advocate's turn. Crispus addressed Turia as 'sacristan' and asked if she wished to be seated while they talked. She declined but you could see she was impressed with his courtesy. And I think he also scored a few points with the spectators and perhaps with a few jurymen.

"I've only a few questions for you, Turia," Crispus told her reassuringly. "The priestess Marcia Renata's reputation was that of an open, untroubled woman. A friendly and easy-going person in contrast to a reserved and conservative one. Would you agree with that, Turia?"

"Yes, I would, sir. I'd known her ever since she entered the shrine as a novice and even as a child, she was a happy, carefree little girl."

"Tell me, Turia, how she conducted herself when you met her in the entrance hall of the residence on the night in question. That was, you testified, early in the eleventh hour. Did she behave in the manner you would normally have expected of her? Think carefully, Turia. Your honest answer is important to this court."

She hesitated, glancing nervously at the Chief Vestal who sat beside Macro in the first row of the privileged spectators. "Well, sir, the lady Marcia had been ill, you understand. Perhaps she was still feeling poorly."

Observing Turia benevolently, Crispus employed his dramatic pause. "From your answer, Turia, I take it she didn't seem to be her usual self. Perhaps under stress or her thoughts elsewhere. Is that correct, Turia?"

"In a way, sir, but she wasn't acting nervously or anything like that. She seemed normal other than looking as though she hadn't slept well. But because I knew the lady so well, I just knew something was troubling her. Oh, sir, it's so hard to explain."

"You're doing very well, Turia," Crispus smiled. "And now I have only one more question. Do you remember me telling the judges earlier that it would be possible for someone inside the Vestal residence to lure the *janitrix* outside into the forecourt, murder her, lock the residence door, leave the forecourt through the gate, and lock it from the outside? After throwing the keys into the forecourt, that person could then enter the shrine, lock its doors from inside and return into the residence. Do you remember?"

"I do, sir."

"Turia, you know your way around the residence and shrine probably as well as the Chief Vestal herself, I'm sure. And you certainly know the routines and duties of the staff. So tell me, in all honesty, is what I have described possible? I do not ask you to say it's probable, only possible. Tell me, Tura Cornelia."

"Oh, sir, it's possible," Turia replied desolately.



"You are Quintus Sutorius Anthus, freedman of the prefect Quintus Naevius Cordus Sutorius Macro," Cassis said. "You are employed in the prefect's household as *procurator* and *amanuensis*."

"I am, sir."

My concern over giving testimony had dissipated for the most part after the prosecutor's straightforward questions and I no longer dreaded the examination by Vibius Crispus. I know now that I was wrong.

"During the investigation of the shrine murders, you were assigned to the Urban Cohorts eighth city district to assist the tribune in command. This was effected by the prefect Sutorius Macro because of your proven clerical and administrative skills."

"I was, sir."

The prosecutor questioned me in some detail about my activity in the shrine on the morning of August the twelfth, everything from sketching the positions of the bodies to finding the coins in the mouths of the corpses. He was most interested in the copy of the lettering inscribed in blood on the altar by Serena Hateria. I assured him it was a true copy and that it could be attested to by others present at the scene of the crime. He had me confirm I had been present when Marcia Renata's letter had been found in her chambers. Other than that, Cassius had no further queries. The altar inscription and the letter seemed to be his major interest.

Crispus treated me with the same courtesy he'd shown Turia, with the exception of offering me a chair. As he himself had stated earlier, Crispus had been doing his work while most of the city reveled in the spirit of the games. It may have been a ploy on his part to impress or even intimidate me from the outset, but in his opening comments he revealed that he knew my racial ancestry and background, my wife's name, how long we'd been married, that I spoke and wrote fluent Greek, and so on.

"Your notes and diagrams made at the crime scene are most commendable, Sutorius Anthus," he said pleasantly, "and I accept them as valid evidence of what you found there. Would that all crimes were so well documented! But let me examine one piece in particular, namely your replica of the inscription on the altar."

He retrieved the copy of my drawing from the clerk and passed it to me. "Please describe to the court what this is and the circumstances attending it."

I held up the papyrus sheet, displaying it to the jurymen. "This is an exact copy of the inscription found on the front of the altar of Vesta, close beside the body of the Vestal Serena Hateria," I told them confidently. "The original copy I made was on a wax tablet, then later I transcribed it onto papyrus to render it more durable and legible. The notations in the bottom right corner indicate the distance from the altar platform to the bottom of the letter 'G,' the distance from the left corner of the altar, as one faces it, to the letter 'G' and the angle of the line of the three letters relative to the base of the altar."

I was pleased with my description. That wasn't too difficult, was it? I thought. And the young advocate was smiling at me.

"A most lucid explanation, Sutorius Anthus," he said. "Thank you. But please, continue."

"Sir?"

"Well, you've explained the source of your drawing, yes. But I asked you about the circumstances related to it. We know that the inscription wasn't a permanent design on the face of the altar, don't we?"

Watch it, Anthus, I thought. He's no longer playing the amiable advocate. An edge to his voice now. "Oh. Yes, sir. The letters had been written in blood by the lady Serena Hateria. Now,

from the way the start of the unfinished fourth letter trails downward abruptly, one can assume the lady either died at that point or was too weak to continue. And I..."

"One moment, Sutorius Anthus!" Crispus interrupted. "From your words, I take it that you were personally present when the priestess wrote on the altar front."

"No. Of course I wasn't there."

"You *weren't* there? But as a sworn witness you've just informed the court that Serena Hateria wrote the inscription! But perhaps someone else witnessed the act and told you about it later. Ah yes, that must be it. Tell us who this person was, Sutorius Anthus."

"Nobody told me!" I cried, forgetting the rule of rhetoric that says the first person to raise his voice in an exchange is on the losing side. "Sir, it seems quite obvious that the priestess did it," I said more calmly. "Her body was lying beside the altar, her upper arms close to the inscription, and her forefinger was smeared with blood."

"And this is indisputable proof that she wrote on the altar? But let me ask you this, and I want you to answer with logical thought, throwing off any preconceptions you have. Is it possible the writing could have been done by another person? A clever person who determined how far and to what height the dead priestess could have reached if she made such an inscription? This person could then have dipped a finger into Serena Hateria's blood and written on the altar. And then rubbed the dead Priestess's finger in her own blood and positioned her hand below the writing as though it had fallen there before completing the fourth letter. Think, Sutorius Anthus. Is such a thing possible?"

Disconcerted, I stood silent a moment or two trying to collect my thoughts. Crispus sensed my indecision and said quietly so that only I could hear, "You're an intelligent, mature man, proven by your vocation and position. Being so deeply involved in this unhappy situation, you must have some prejudiced thoughts. It's human nature. But I beg you to suppress them. Please tell me, would the altar scene I have suggested be at all possible?"

I hesitated. I could feel the eye of every judge upon me. I knew the only answer I could give was the one wanted by the young advocate. "Yes. It would be possible, sir."

"Thank you, Sutorius Anthus," he said, the steely edge gone from his voice. "Now just one further question. I'm sure you recall the question I put to Turia Cornelia concerning the possibility of someone exiting the Vestal residence entrance, murdering the door-keeper and re-entering through the shrine door. Yes? Then I put the same question to you. Could someone have carried out the procedure I described?"

"Yes, sir," I answered. Well, what else could I have said? Damn it, both events, the writing on the altar and the murder of the *janitrix*, both were entirely possible. Not probable, I know. But possible!



The examination of the defense witnesses, Corax and Probus, were completed quickly. Crispus had them swear that Florianus had been drunk to the point of unconsciousness on the night of the murders and that they personally had carried him to his bed. They also testified as to the amiability and general good qualities of the accused.

The chief prosecutor designated his assistant Pusio to question them. The two unsophisticated men were no match for the arrogant, sneering jibes and distortions of Pusio. He suggested that neither witness was credible, and both were probably more inebriated than the accused on the night in question. He was at his obnoxious worst. I exulted inwardly when a large

number of spectators booed him and shouted obscenities. I really believe that Crispus erred in presenting the two hapless men as witnesses and that Cassius Longinus was injudicious in allowing Pusio to question them. Neither side benefitted, although the edge might have gone to Crispus due to Pusio's deplorable style.

Prosecution and defense were each granted one clepsydra for their final summation. Cassius Longinus had nothing much to say other than his reiteration that the writing on the altar front and Marcia Renata's letter were surely proof enough of Florianus' guilt.

Crispus urged the judges to see that proof of guilt had not been demonstrated by the prosecutor whereas the defense had shown that every point of circumstantial evidence was flawed by having a valid alternative explanation. He stressed that Serena Hateria's will had been of far greater benefit to other heirs than it had been to Florianus.

His concluding remarks were, "In my total confidence that this is a just cause, I appeal to you, judges, to release an innocent man and let him return to his friends and neighbors. You will earn his and their respect and honor for all time. By the acquittal of Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus, you will have demonstrated before all Rome that preconception and prejudice might exist in the marketplace, but they have no place in a court of law. And that the court, which is the temple of truth, is guarded by good and just men."

CHAPTER XXXVI

The judges were each given a stylus and a tablet waxed on both sides. On one side was the letter 'A,' for *absolvo* and on the other a 'C' for *condemno*. With his stylus, each judge erased one inscription, leaving the other to show his decision. The magistrate's clerk and an assistant collected the tablets and took them to the clerk's table.

Two judges, a knight, and a tribal representative, acted as *scrutatores* and witnessed the clerk's tally of the votes. After a second count, the clerk wrote on a tablet and passed it to the magistrate. The murmuring of the spectators died as the *praetor* rose.

"The one hundred and five judges," he declared, "have made their decision. *Condemno*, fifty-four. *Absolvo*, fifty-one." He faced the accused. "Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus, this court has found you guilty of the charges made against you. You are sentenced to be executed on the Kalends of October at a place and by a method yet to be decided."

The magistrate's shout for order went unheard amid the crowd's unruly roars of approval, cries of outrage, and milling turmoil. It took the Praetorian guardsmen and police several minutes to force the pugnacious, shouting mob into the forum where a thousand others had already gathered. In moments the word spread. Florianus had been condemned by almost a tied vote. Two votes more on his behalf and he would have been acquitted! From inside the basilica, we could hear the raging arguments and the destructive clatter of pillage outside. I could imagine the shopkeepers hastily putting up their shutters and barring their doors. The Urban Cohorts would have a long night of it, trying to restore the peace.

At the first sound of discord, Macro had hurried out of the basilica by the small door at the northwest end of the building, no doubt to organize police reinforcements from other city districts. The remainder of the court and the privileged spectators remained inside, intimidated by the rising tumult out in the forum. The *praetor* directed us to leave, in small groups, through the door Macro had used, then to disperse along the Via Nova that runs along the back of the basilica.

While the others slowly filed out, those of us at the defense and prosecution tables remained seated. I watched the accused—now the condemned—and his advocate as the judges vacated their seats. Gaius Quintus stared vacantly into space, ashen-faced, his hands folded before him on the table. Crispus sat beside him, a hand resting gently on Gaius's arm. He was looking at the prosecutors.

What happened next left me with respect for Cassius Longinus. He stood, moved to the front of his table, and bowed with sincere courtesy to Vibius Crispus. The young advocate inclined his head in respect to Cassius.

Then Cassius turned to his two assistants. "Gentlemen," he said quietly, "during this trial we were privileged to face a rising star in the field of Roman jurisprudence. Mark him well. With less than two years experience and against all odds, that young man damn near won this case."



Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus was executed this morning on the third day after his trial ended. He was beheaded by the public *carnifex* in the Praetorian camp with only official witnesses present. Those in charge, including Macro, decided against public execution, knowing that the volatile Roman citizenry would seize the occasion for rioting and uproar in general.

Gaius Quintus's body was thrown into the Tiber and his head mounted on a pole on the speakers' *rostra*. There it remained for three days, watched over by a detachment of police. Its sightless eyes stared down the length of the forum toward the shrine of Vesta where the crimes of sacrilege had occurred.

He was treated quite well, considering. Not so long ago he would have been flogged close to death, then sewn in a leather sack with a dog, a monkey, a rooster, and a snake, and flung into the Tiber.

And so ends the story of Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus.

I really must get down to the Velabrum and see how the statues are progressing. I'll take our artistic expert, young Rufinus, with me. I've been neglecting the lad lately.

CHAPTER XXXVII

The mornings are cooler now and a touch of frost was in the air when Rufinus and I left to visit the sculptor early in the second hour. The boy doesn't have to attend school, it being a market day. I'd waited a few days until after the head of Gaius Quintus had been removed from the rostra, not wanting to expose Rufinus to such a sight as we passed through the forum.

My solicitous concern was wasted. Walking past the rostra the boy cried, "Oh, look! That's where the head of Florianus was stuck on a pole!"

"And just how do you know that?" I asked.

"Our *magister* brought our class here to see it. There were two crows pecking at it. He takes us to different places in the city every few weeks. He says it broadens our education," Rufinus explained.

"That's nice," I said, without conviction.

"Our *magister* says that school is more than just books and recitation and such things. It's also about examining the rich tapestry of life."

"Such as heads stuck on poles," I observed.

"Oh, yes. And other things, too" He chattered happily as I reflected on the wretched state of education today—damned teachers with their social studies and other nonsense when they should be pounding grammar and mathematics into their pupils. Now, when I was a schoolboy, we were students, not tourists gadding carefree about the city. Rich tapestry of life, indeed!

Iktinos the sculptor greeted us heartily, instantly resuming the professional rapport he and Rufinus had share some twelve weeks ago. "Vah!" he exclaimed. "It is the young master come to observe the progress of his statues of Mars and Apollo!"

His statues?

Under a three-sided shed in the work yard two sculptors busied themselves with a marble statue lying face up on a long waist-high table. "The rough form was done by apprentices," Iktinos said, "and now it is being finished by Decius and Fannia. Each is a qualified *opifex*." The female artisan, Fannia, had been working on Apollo's face and her colleague on the hand of the right arm. They ceased work and stepped back as we approached.

The head, hands and feet would be finished first, Iktinos told us, being the most demanding in detail and most prone to damage. Then the torso, arms and legs would be given their final touches of vein, bone, and muscle ridges. Lastly a polisher would treat the statue with varying grades of abrasive material to give it a velvety sheen.

"Ah, wait and see!" Iktinos cried. "Such a perfect block of Etrurian Luna as this will bask in the glory of its own moon glow! Its beholders will gasp in amazement at the..."

"Yes, I believe you," I interrupted. Never let a Greek get settled into a discourse. It'll go on and on. Much like the Gauls, although the Greeks don't flap their hands about with such gay abandon as your average Gaul.

"But when will the statues be completed? Our agreement was for the *idus* of January, however, you thought they might be ready by the *Saturnalia*."

He stroked his chin thoughtfully and stared for a moment or two at the marble figure. "There's about seven or eight weeks work, no more. I should have them delivered by early December, perhaps before."

"My master will be grateful to you," I lied. Macro rarely feels obligation to anyone. "He and his lady will be entertaining prior to the *Saturnalia* and your statues will be placed in prominent

positions. And," I added, "I shall certainly ensure that his distinguished guests know who the artist is."

"But where," piped up Rufinus, "are his bow and lyre?"

"*Edipol!*" Iktinos gasped, smacking his forehead in despair. "How could I have forgotten the bow and lyre!" he grinned at the dismayed boy. "No, don't worry, lad. They'll be fashioned of bronze and fitted to Apollo after he's positioned in your house. And speaking of bronze, the Mars pieces are being fabricated in the foundry and I'll have them here next week. It'll only take a few weeks to assemble them and buff and polish."

I studied the face of Apollo as it gazed upward to the ceiling of the shed. The marble features, yet to be refined and polished, already possessed both strength and serenity in their Olympian nobility. When completed, surely it would be of equal beauty to the Apollo of the shrine of Vesta.

"This face," I told Iktinos, "is much like that of another Apollo I saw recently."

"But," said the sculptor, "the other statue's lyre was in his left hand and not at his feet. Am I right, Sutorius Anthus?"

"How could you know that?"

"I believe you refer to the Apollo in the shrine of Vesta. You see, I was a spectator at the trial of Florianus. I saw you and heard you testify. I'm sure a perceptive man like yourself would have noticed my Apollo in the shrine. Yes, it too was created here and worked upon by these same two artisans. That's why you see a likeness in the faces."

"You're right, Iktinos. It was the shrine statue I referred to."

"It was made for a family as a gift to the shrine. They insisted it be a copy of an ancient one by Pythagoras." He winked at me and glanced at Rufinus. "At least your Apollo is an original, having been designed by the young master here."

"The Vestals' statue is quite new, then?"

"Oh, yes. I'd have to consult my records to be exact, but I delivered it to the shrine around the end of July or early August."

I recalled the Chief Vestal telling me in late August that the statue had only been about three weeks in the shrine.

As we departed the shop, Iktinos gave Rufinus a small bronze figure of a rearing horse with flying mane and tail. "You'll have to give him a name, boy. A fine horse like this needs a splendid name, eh?"

"He's truly a splendid horse, sir. Thank you! And I shall call him 'Iktinos' in your honor!" The sculptor beamed with pleasure.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

For several days after the execution of Gaius Quintus I was ill at ease. Had the loquacious argument of young Vibius Crispus instilled doubt in me as it obviously had with almost half the judges? Much as I disliked Gaius Quintus, I wondered if the prejudice of the marketplace had indeed crept into a Roman court of law. But soon the pressure of other matters neglected in recent months left me little time to ponder the past and I gave no further thought to the trial.

Yes, the last two months have been busy. My *domina* is going through one of her periodic house renovation obsessions. I've already obtained estimates for two large painted murals. One is Bacchus taming a centaur for the *tablinum* wall and for the *atrium* a swarm of cupidines gathering grapes, making wine and sampling same. Why the god of wine, son of Jupiter, would wish to subdue a harmless centaur eludes me. As for cupids making merry in various ways, that's just the latest fashion.

My lady Ennia desires also a large mosaic in the center of the *atrium* floor, details yet to be decided. But it'll depict Ceres, goddess of growth, in a design of flowers, fruit and vegetables. At first, I wasn't too sure that Ceres was suitable since it clashes somewhat with the militant figure of Mars. But they're both Olympians and Mars is the god of agriculture, among other things, so I suppose they're compatible enough.

But her chief fixation is to have a *nymphaeum* constructed in the courtyard, something grand with splashing fountain, mosaic artwork, roof supported by marble columns and the usual statuary of nymphs. I'd hardly call my *domina* a religious zealot, so why she'd spend so much money creating a shrine for demigods nobody really believes in makes me wonder.

But there's no talking to her once she gets onto something. Well, women—there's really no talking to any of them, is there?

Our statues have been delivered. Iktinos was as good as his word and brought them in the morning of the first day of December. His horse cart was stopped by an Urban Cohort patrol, carts being prohibited in the city streets in daylight hours. But when he produced his bill of sale in the name of Sutorius Macro the policemen insisted on providing an escort for him.

So now Mars Ultor is a commanding presence in the *atrium*, his strong features asserting vigilance and authority. And Apollo graces the *triclinium*, mounted on a pedestal in a corner from where his serene, benevolent face gazes into the dining area. Our Apollo is as beautiful as his counterpart whose eyes are fixed on the altar of Vesta.

After Iktinos and his assistants had secured the statues in their places, I told him, "Your work is beyond my poor description, so I shall steal the words of the poet Vergilius. Iktinos, you have molded lifelike bronze to the greatest perfection, and you have won from marble the look of life."

The sculptor was well pleased with such praise and, I think, even more pleased when I took him and his helpers to my office where we demolished a few pitchers of an excellent Sabine and a large platter of Petronia's spiced sausage rolls.



We will celebrate the great festival of Saturn, the *Saturnalia*, the final holiday before the year ends not many days from now. No games are held during the festival, no races, no gladiators, no wild beast shows. Instead, it's a time for the carefree mingling of all social classes, a time of

merriment and good will.

The streets of Rome are thronged day and night by citizens and slaves, happily calling out '*Io Saturnalia!*' to each other. Formality is forgotten for those few days. The toga is discarded and everyone, from nobles to slaves, wears the traditional cap of a freedman, the soft, floppy *pileus*. There's gambling in the streets while the police look the other way and tables of food are set out everywhere for all to share. Neighbors and friends exchange gifts and children are given toys by their families. And on the first day of the festival, the seventeenth of December, slaves are waited upon at table by their masters and mistresses.

It's a splendid way to end the year. Of course, everyone asks the same question during every *Saturnalia*. 'Why can't we share this warmth and good feeling all year long and not just during the December holiday?' They won't, though. Business as usual in January. But for the next few days, everybody will cry out '*Io Saturnalia!*' to those they meet. And it will be, for most of them, a happy *Saturnalia*.

But not for me. Not this year.



Macro and his wife held a large dinner party on the *idus* of December, four days before the start of the *Saturnalia*. Four months have passed since the profanation of the shrine of Vesta, the rites of purification are long completed, and Rome has resumed its social life.

It was a bit of a squeeze, but I arranged the dining room for thirty-six people, couches on four sides with chairs for the more conservative ladies who prefer to dine seated after the fashion of their ancestors.

Our chef, Cердо, and my wife, Petronia, spent three days preparing for the twelve-course banquet. I hired three cooks to assist and six food and wine servers. For entertainment, there were a troupe of Egyptian acrobats and jugglers, a dramatic poet, a magician assisted by a scantily clad Nubian girl and a comic monologist who deplored his mother-in-law. During the meal, a flautist and tambourine player strolled leisurely about the room, their soft melody barely heard above the hum of conversation and laughter.

There was no guest of honor, formally, but de facto Plautius Caesennius Pastor held that distinction. Macro's couch was flanked by Pastor to his right and young Caligula to the left. Facing them on chairs were my *domina* and Pastor's wife, an overly plump, garrulous lady who believed her long-lost youth could be regained through an excess of cosmetics and gaudy jewels.

Pastor's celebrated status as the augur who'd foretold the shrine's profanation was waning. But some of the wealthy matrons still thought him a social catch for their gatherings. He was probably making the most of it while he could. He struck me as a bombastic old fool and I'm sure Macro thought the same.

As household steward, my place at a banquet is standing close to the foot of Macro's couch. From there I can keep an eye on the servants' performance and be available should my master need me. And from such a position I can overhear the conversation of those in Macro's vicinity.

While Pastor stuffed himself with partridge, sea-scorpion, suckling pig, sow's womb, dormice, meatballs in laser sauce, and every course offered, he entertained his hosts with the story of his renowned augury. One which I suspect was highly embellished with each retelling.

"...and when young Lentulus Gaetulicus told me what he had witnessed," Pastor said, "I swear by the ashes of my ancestors that an icy hand seized my heart, and I heard a distant, mournful keening which an inner voice told me were the gods on Mount Olympus wailing in

despair."

He waited while the ladies gave dutiful gasps of wonderment and the men shook their heads in awe. "When I realized the indescribable malignancy of the divination I would have to pronounce, I sat as though one in a trance," Pastor continued. "And in that trance, there appeared before me Mercury, son of Jupiter, messenger of the gods. He stood before me and commanded, 'Rise, mortal! Wretched though your lot may be, you have an obligation to the senate and people of Rome! Rise and do your duty!' Then he was gone."

Again, the gasps and head-shaking. Macro looked up and caught my eye. Appropriately sober faced at Pastor's tale, he winked at me and turned away.

"Removing my blindfold, I raised my eyes to young Gaetulicus. He must have sensed that he had been privy to an awesome event for his face was bloodless and his eyes wide with foreboding. 'My boy,' I said to him gently, 'the *auspicium* you have taken foretells a profanation of the shrine of Vesta.' The lad cried out in terrible anguish and fell upon his knees before me. Eyes streaming with tears, he clasped his arms about my legs and buried his face against me, poor despairing fellow."

"How despairing was he?" Macro asked guilelessly, glancing straight-faced at me.

"He sobbed, trembled and moaned incoherently," replied Pastor, holding his cup toward a wine server. "I comforted him and assisted him as we made our way from the *auguraculum* to the temple of Jupiter Best and Greatest."

The old man prattled on another ten minutes or so, but wine had addled him. When he began repeating himself, Macro signaled me to bring on the entertainers. A sesame-coated, honey-glazed dormouse clutched in his hand, the great augur slept while acrobats tumbled, and jugglers filled the air with burning torches, knives, and axes.

It was close to the end of the sixth night hour, that time midway between sunset and dawn. Some of the guests had departed and others, like Caesennius Pastor, snored on their couches. The entertainers had left, having been paid by me and given refreshments in the servants' dining hall. I had dismissed the hired catering staff, my own people being adequate to attend to the party which had almost run its course.

I was still by my master's couch as he chatted with two members of the imperial family, Caligula, and senator Domitius Ahenobarbus. The senator, who has a loathsome reputation for cruelty and arrogance, is married to Caligula's sister, Agrippina. Noticing that Ahenobarbus was beginning to nod, Caligula, said, "It's time I took my brother-in-law home, Macro. He's over-indulged himself. As usual."

As servants assisted the senator out of the dining room and sent for his litter, Caligula went over to the statue of Apollo.

"I must congratulate you on your Apollo," he said to Macro "Beautiful indeed. It's quite similar to the one in the shrine of Vesta. That one holds his lyre in the left hand as I recall but I like this better, holding up the bow."

And so they should be similar, I thought wearily, both having been born in the same sculptor's shop.

"Aha, you sly old dog," Macro said jovially. "What were you doing in the Vestal shrine, eh? Emulating the late Clodius Pulcher and his escapades with the ladies, were you?" Macro referred, of course, to the event some ninety years ago when a young patrician hell-raiser had disguised himself as a woman and sneaked into the secret rites of the Good Goddess, Bona Dea, a gathering restricted to women only.

"No, Macro," Caligula replied, "I'm not the adventurer that Clodius was. My presence in the

shrine was most proper. It was at the annual rekindling of the sacred fire on the first of March. Great uncle Tiberius showing no inclination to leave his island, I represented the imperial family. While waiting for the rites to commence, I looked about the shrine. Can't really say I was impressed. Of course, you've been in it, during your investigation. That's when I noticed the shrine's Apollo, flanking the main entrance with another statue. Minerva, I believe. Probably her. She's graced the Vestal shrine in various forms for centuries."

"I noticed some statues but didn't pay much attention," Macro said. "Had other things on my mind at the time."

It had been an exhausting day, and I was dog-tired. But I was jarred wide awake by Caligula's words! My mind raced and I heard the Chief Vestal. *'We've only had it three weeks, since the beginning of the month.'* I heard the voice of Iktinos the sculptor. *'I delivered it to the shrine around the end of July.'* And Caligula, now walking out of the dining room with Macro's arm about his shoulder, had said, *'It was at the annual rekindling of the sacred fire on the first of March.'*

But on the first of March the Vestals' statue of Apollo had been little more than a roughly chiseled block of Luna marble in the sculptor's workplace. Yet Caligula had described its finished appearance and known its exact location in the shrine, a statue that had only been there ten or twelve days before a dying priestess had written in blood on the altar. Before she died, she inscribed 'GAI.' And I had copied her lettering and presented it as evidence to a Roman court, evidence that was at least partly responsible for a man being condemned to death.

Gaius Quintus Haterius Florianus was innocent.

The murderer who Serena Hateria had tried to name as her life ebbed was Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus. If only she'd attempted to inscribe 'Caligula,' or at least part of that name, enough doubt would surely have been created in the judges' minds to absolve Gaius Quintus. But the priestess was a conservative woman by reputation and would probably have disapproved of the undignified nickname of 'little boot.'

Both Serena Hateria and I had contributed unwittingly to the execution of her adoptive brother.

EPILOGUE

The Saturnalia has passed and the city drifts along in the torpor that always follows great festivals. Tomorrow on the first day of January, the new consuls will sacrifice white bulls to Jupiter in front of his temple and vow publicly to protect Rome during their tenure of office. Then they will proceed to the senate house and preside over its first meeting of the year. The populace will watch the sacrifice and the procession, but only if the weather is favorable. It's not an exciting event, no free banquets or merrymaking. January is a dreary month.

I'm still haunted by the words of Caligula. I know it was he who entered the shrine that July night and not Gaius Quintus. And I know what I'm going to do about it.

Nothing.

'*Irritabis crabrones*' the playwright said long ago. He was right. Stir up a hornet's nest and it's you who will be stung.

There were two people I wished to talk with. Neither would change my mind about Caligula, but they might give support to my convictions. And so, during the Saturnalia, I called upon them, taking each the traditional Saturnalia gift of candles as the reason for my visit. I first went to the dingy tavern in the Street of the Silversmiths. Corax seemed discomfited at first; he remembered me from the trial when we sat at opposing tables. But he's a decent fellow and when I asked for a few minutes of his time, he took me into his small office with a pitcher of wine and two cups. After awkward seasonal pleasantries, I came straight to the point.

"Corax, you testified on behalf of Gaius Quintus at his trial, you and the other man, Probus. And in the face of terrible bullying by the prosecution advocate, you remained steadfast in declaring his innocence. Do you still believe so?"

"I know so," he replied.

"I now believe it, also. And although there's nothing that can be done for Gaius Quintus now, I'd like you to tell me about that night in your tavern."

He told me the details of his annual party the night prior to the festival of Hercules. How Gaius Quintus had been present from the first night hour to the eighth hour, the life of the party and drinking with abandon. How, when he passed out, Corax and Probus had carried him upstairs to his room and laid him on his bed.

"Never seen old Gaius Quintus so drunk," Corax said. "And in my business, I seen a lot of that. Right out of it, he was. And next morning no sign of him. So, I went up to his room about noon. On the floor, he was. Snoring in a puddle of his own vomit. Reckon he fell outta bed in the night. No, he was in that there room from the time we took him. And there just ain't no argument about that."

As I left, Corax insisted on giving me a bottle of wine as a festival gift. "And this is the good stuff," he confided. "Not the plonk I usually serve."

The next day I called upon the Chief Vestal. I was apprehensive at first that the lady Cornelia might consider me presumptuous, but I needn't have worried. She greeted me warmly and led me into the courtyard. The day was pleasant for the time of year and we strolled for half an hour.

"I thank you for your gift, Sutorius Anthus," she said, "but somehow I feel the spirit of the Saturnalia isn't the real reason for your visit."

"True, lady," I admitted. "Although the trial of Florianus is three months past, I am now plagued by doubt concerning his guilt. The words of his advocate may have affected me, but it's something more than that. I thought that by talking with you, my mind may be put at rest."

We walked a dozen paces in silence, then she said, "When Florianus was condemned, I agreed with that verdict, Anthus. Regardless of that clever young advocate's argument, I believed, and still do, that Marcia Renata's letter told the truth. The letter, the inscription on the altar and my personal distaste for Florianus made it obvious to me that he was guilty. But now..." She stopped and looked directly into my eyes. "...like yourself, I have doubt. Doubt that has nagged me for many weeks. I do not consider the proof was conclusive."

"Lady, you confided in me a few months ago, here in this courtyard, that Marcia Renata had been pregnant, and that you had even deduced the occasion. Will you confide further? What was the occasion?"

"It was the annual banquet of the flautists' guild. On the *idus* of June in the temple of Minerva. Each year the Vestals are invited, and Marcia Renata was our representative this year. As you know, it's a rowdy event and she didn't return until quite late, closer to sunrise than midnight. I'd had a restless night and during the tenth hour I came out here to the courtyard to sit awhile under the stars. While I was here the night watch servant came out on her rounds and told me that Marcia Renata had just returned."

"Surely, lady, you didn't think that she had been, well, um, intimate with a flute player?"

"Oh, certainly not, Anthus. Carefree and gregarious as she was, she was well aware of her patrician status. Never a flute player! But she did tell me later she had been escorted home by a patrician of noble family in his private litter."

"And you believe it was he, who..."

"Seduced her? Yes. Why are you concerned about this, Anthus?"

"Because, lady, I wonder if it may have something to do with the terrible events that followed. And I have another question. Was Caligula the imperial family representative when the sacred fire was rekindled last March?"

"A strange question, Anthus. Yes, he was."

"Had he had occasion to enter the shrine since then?

"None. Other than yourself, Macro, Ballista and the *libitinarii*, no man has been in the shrine since the annual rite. Other than the murderer of Serena Hateria."

I told her of the conversation I'd overheard between Macro and Caligula. She took my meaning at once. "That can only mean that Caligula was in the shrine after the Apollo had been placed there."

"Yes, lady."

"The Vestals are acquainted with all of the imperial family," she said. "Serena Hateria would have recognized him. And his name is Gaius! So now I'll tell you that the man who brought Marcia Renata back from the banquet was Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus, the beloved 'Caligula' of the masses."

The courtyard was chilly now, the sun banished by gray, cheerless clouds. In the seclusion of her office, we examined closely every aspect of the case from the night of the flautists' banquet to the death of the two priestesses and the *janitrix*.

Combining our knowledge of people and events, we concluded that Gaius Quintus had coerced Marcia Renata into giving him his adoptive sister's will and that he'd either altered it or left it intact, satisfied with its provisions. But the Chief Vestal doubted the priestess's letter had told the whole truth. Would Gaius Quintus have been so incautious as to make threats against Marcia Renata's noble family or to murder his adoptive sister? It seemed unlikely. She was certain that Caligula had seduced Marcia Renata and later she had foolishly told him of her abortion. She'd paid for that with her life but not in the way Caligula had intended.

Caligula had betrayed himself by claiming to have seen a statue in the shrine, a statue which didn't exist at the time. He did see it, though, more than four months later when he murdered a young slave and a priestess, thinking he'd silenced Marcia Renata forever. But in the faltering light of the altar fire, he'd slain the wrong woman.

The suicide of Marcia Renata perplexed us. We dismissed the suggestion of the advocate, Crispus—who had been careful to only 'suggest' and not accuse—that Marcia Renata had killed her friend. No, the sin which weighed upon her wasn't that, nor could it have been her dereliction of trust as custodian of the wills.

After long deliberation, we agreed that in all probability Marcia Renata truly believed that Gaius Quintus had murdered his adoptive sister. And it was mostly likely that he'd coerced Marcia Renata with the threat of exposing her abortion. He'd undoubtedly been the agent through which Serena Hateria had procured the abortion for her sister Vestal. Marcia Renata had wished to shield her parents from her transgression, and this is where her letter told only a half-truth.

The sin of Marcia Renata had been her betrayal of her vow of chastity to Vesta, the consequences of which had led to the death of Serena Hateria. In atonement, she took her own life.

It was close to sunset when the lady Cornelia and I reached across the table and for a moment of emotional silence clasped each other's hands tightly.

Before I left her, the Chief Vestal said, "Sutorius Anthus, we have shared a secret before and now we must share this one. We know that Florianus was innocent, worthless, and evil as he was. And we know who is guilty. But we can't prove it. You're a young man with a promising future. *Noli irritare leones.*"

I'll follow her advice. I won't provoke the lions. Their claws are long and sharp.



Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Nero, *princeps* of Rome and *pontifex maximus*, recently turned seventy-one. They say he's in good health. And his mother died not long ago at the ripe old age of eighty-six.

Even so, there is already speculation over who will succeed Tiberius. Forceful seizure of the principate by some aspiring politician is unlikely. The people wouldn't tolerate it. They still remember the suffering and deprivation of the civil wars which ended with the golden age of Augustus.

It is almost certain the emperor will designate a member of his family as successor. The renowned Germanicus, nephew and adopted son of Tiberius, would undoubtedly have become the next *princeps* of Rome. But he died ten years ago, leaving a widow and many children. One of those children was Caligula.

Accordingly, Caligula is a possible contender. He has the right pedigree, being descended from both the Julian and Claudian clans.

But there is another family member to consider. Gemellus, now ten years old, is the son of Drusus. And Drusus was the son of Tiberius. Gemellus is the direct blood descendant of Tiberius; Caligula is only a great-nephew.

One of them will succeed Tiberius and the betting is that it will be Gemellus. Yes, he's only ten now, but his grandfather probably has several years yet to live.

I take quiet pleasure in knowing the detestable Caligula will never be emperor of Rome.

POSTSCRIPT

...the real historical people

Quintus Naevius Cordus Sutorius Macro — achieved the powerful post of Praetorian Prefect in 31 CE, two years after this story. Friend and mentor to the young Caligula who succeeded Tiberius as emperor, Macro was promoted to the prefecture of Egypt in 38 CE. He and his wife were executed by Caligula before he assumed the position.

Tiberius Caesar — the second Roman emperor, ruling from 14 to 37 CE. A competent general under his stepfather, Augustus Caesar, his own regime was unpopular with both senate and the populace. Although a capable administrator, his frugality with state funds resulted in minimal new construction and repair. He spent the last ten years of his rule in Capreae, the Isle of Capri, where allegedly he indulged in dissolute pleasures.

Caligula — Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus, son of the renowned general Germanicus who died when Caligula was a child. After his mother and brothers were banished and possibly murdered by Tiberius, Caligula lived with Livia, Tiberius's mother, until her death in 29 CE. He then lived with Antonia, the widowed sister-in-law of Tiberius until 31 CE, when he joined Tiberius in Capreae. Succeeding Tiberius in 38 CE, his four years as emperor were marked with cruelty and financial chaos. He was assassinated by officers of the Praetorian Guard in 41 CE.

Cassius Chaerea — a distinguished soldier in the Roman army, he became a tribune in the Praetorian Guard. He led the cabal of Praetorian officers which assassinated Caligula in 41 CE and was executed for this by Claudius, Caligula's successor.

Gaius Cassius Longinus — a descendant of the Cassius who was a ringleader in the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BCE, he was a renowned jurist. He became consul in 30 CE and later was governor of Syria for five years. He founded a legal school whose followers were called the 'Cassiani.'

Quintus Vibius Crispus — orator and barrister who became consul three times and was a friend of the emperors Nero, Vitellius, Vespasian, and Domitian. Said to be friendly and gentle-mannered, he was disliked by his peers in the senate because of his aggressive ambition.

Titus Flavius Vespasianus — emperor from 69 to 79 CE, Vespasian achieved fame during his British campaign under the emperor Claudius and later in the Jewish War under Nero. Following the disastrous reign of Nero, Vespasian exercised tight leadership and is considered to have been a constructive emperor.

GLOSSARY

Advocatus — a 'lawyer' in modern terms, an advocate advised in litigation and prosecuted or defended in the law courts.

Aedile — a junior elected magistrate who was chiefly involved in civic administration. A stepping-stone to higher office.

Augur — an elected member of the College of Augurs, one of the priestly colleges. Augurs didn't foretell the future but interpreted certain 'signs' as being favorable or otherwise for upcoming events.

Equestrian Order — Members of the *ordo equester*, the *equites*—knights—were originally a middle class between the patricians and the lower classes of plebians. By the early Empire, they had achieved considerable influence through their wealth. Financial qualification for the order was 400,000 *sesterces* in assets and admission was by birthright or appointment by the emperor. The knights eventually dominated the senate and held most of the Empire's administrative posts.

Forum Romanum — a large open space in the center of Rome which was surrounded by public buildings — temples, law courts, business offices and the senate house. It was the focal point of Roman political, administrative, and economic activity.

Gladiator — a professional fighter who originally performed at privately sponsored funeral games. In the early Roman republic, gladiators didn't fight to the death but by early Empire mortal combat was the rule. Most gladiators were slaves who were contracted out by their owners, then freed if they survived arena combat for a specified period. Like charioteers, they were the athletic heroes of their time.

Guilds — By the first century CE, there were more than 150 artisan and trade guilds in Rome. The ancestors of today's unions, Roman guild corporations had little or no political or economic clout by modern standards. They provided various services to their membership, such as schooling for children, social events, and funeral services. The latter were very important to the Romans; they had a morbid fascination with death and the afterlife and wanted a good send-off when their time came.

Hours of the day — The Roman day had 24 hours, divided into 12 day and 12 night hours. The day hours began at sunrise and ended at sunset. This meant that the hours shortened and lengthened over the year. To illustrate, using modern time designation: the tenth day hour extended from 2:13 to 2:58 p.m. on December 21, but from 3:46 to 5:02 p.m. on June 21. Time, to the Romans, was elastic.

Insula — A relatively small area, ancient Rome was a city of high-rises by necessity; its one million population expanded vertically rather than horizontally, living for the most part in *insulae* (islands), apartment buildings. Some of these rose 100 feet or more, but the average *insula* was above five stories, half that height.

Jupiter — The premier god of the Roman pantheon and patron god of the City of Rome. He was referred to by his full appellation, *Jupiter Optimus Maximus*, Jupiter Best and Greatest.

Lar, lararium — The *lares* were the gods of the home and of crossroads. They were not anthropomorphic deities, but a spiritual presence, having no form, sex, or mythology. The *lararium*, the household's personal family shrine, was a wall niche, usually with doors like a small cupboard. It often held statuettes of family ancestors and other memorabilia.

Lictor — The formal attendants of ranking magistrates, preceding them through the streets to clear the way. In Rome a lictor wore a white toga and carried the *fasces* — a bundle of rods — on his left shoulder. The *fasces* was a symbol of the magistrate's authority: rods for the beating of offenders. Outside Rome the lictor wore a red toga and an axe was enclosed in the *fasces* to signify the magistrate's power of capital punishment. Consuls were preceded by 12 lictors and praetors by two. The only non-magistrates entitled to a lictor were the *flamen Dialis* (high priest of Jupiter) and the Vestal Virgins, who each had one lictor.

Ludi, the 'Games' — The origin of the games is obscure, but they went back many centuries. Early chariot races in honor of the gods expanded to include wild animal hunts and theatrical shows. Gladiatorial shows were at first privately sponsored events but eventually became part of the games. Held at state expense, the games were usually augmented by private funds from wealthy men seeking public office and hoping to curry favor with the populace. Admission was free but freedmen (ex-slaves) were banned until later years in the Empire. Games always opened with a colorful procession.

Mile — The Roman *mille passum* (from which we take our name "mile") translates literally as "a thousand paces." It was a distance of 4,854 feet, roughly equivalent to our mile.

Money — Roman money was minted in ten coins but the only ones worth mentioning here are the *as*, *sestertius*, *denarius*, and *aureus*. The imperial gold *aureus* had the value of 25 silver *denarii*. The *denarius* equaled four bronze *sesterces*; the *sestertius* equaled 12 bronze *asses*. The standard Roman money reference was the *sestertius*, as the dollar is today in the USA. It's misleading to define the value of Roman currency in terms of modern equivalents, but as a comparison guide, the average daily wage of a semi-skilled Roman worker was two *denarii*.

Names — The three names, the *tria nomina*, indicated Roman citizenship. It consisted of the *praenomen*, the given name; the *nomen*, the clan or *gens* name; and the *cognomen*, a family name within the clan. Thus, the name Tiberius Claudius Nero indicates that Tiberius (a first name like John or Peter) belonged to the Nero family branch of the larger clan, Claudius. A very few Romans used only the given and clan names, such as Marcus Antonius (anglicized to Marc Antony) and some took additional names to the *tria nomina*, such as Quintus Naevius Cordus Sutorius Macro.

Nobles, consuls — Not to be confused with a patrician, a noble, *nobilis*, was one descended from a consul of Rome. The nobility included both patricians and plebeians. By mid-fifth century BCE, the earlier Roman kings had been replaced by two consuls, each elected for a one-year term. These were the joint chief magistrates of Rome during the republic and held vast power.

Although their authority waned under the empire, their political and social status remained the highest next to that of the emperor.

Paterfamilias — The "father of the family," the formal head of a family unit, who literally held the power of life and death over family members. His extreme authority was probably an inheritance of the republican belief in the sanctity of the family and the lack of regular courts and policing.

Patrician — By 500 BCE, Roman society had evolved into two socio-political classes, the patricians and the plebians. The patricians were the aristocracy, the oldest and wealthiest families, which dominated senate, priesthood, and public office. During the 500-odd years of the Roman republic, the equestrians, the "knights," emerged from the plebian class and became a minor aristocracy to the patricians. By the time of the first emperor (Augustus Caesar, 27 BCE to 14 CE), the patrician families had been depleted in numbers and political influence shifted toward the wealthy knights.

Praetor — The second highest magistracy, there were usually eight praetors whose duties were chiefly legal. They presided over the criminal courts. Following their one-year term of office, they were often given the governorship of a province.

Roman year date — Romans numbered their years from the founding of Rome in 753 BCE by the legendary king, Romulus. The Roman year was designated by the suffix "AUC," an abbreviation of *ab urbe condita* or, "since the founding of the city." Sometimes this was given as *anno urbis conditae*, "in the year of the founding of the city." Tiberius Caesar was born, to us, in 42 BCE, but, to him, it was 712 AUC.

Senate, senators — The *senatus* was originally comprised of 300 patricians but by early empire, had swollen to about three times that size, more plebian than patrician. Augustus Caesar reduced its size to 600 and established a property requirement of one million *sesterces*. Although the senate lost much of its authority under the empire, it remained a semi-hereditary aristocracy with important duties and prestigious social position. Senators served for life. The badge of distinction for a senator was a broad purple stripe running vertically on his tunic.

Toga — A formal outer white woolen robe worn by Roman citizens, the toga was roughly semi-circular and measured up to 16 by 8 feet for a grown man. When draped, it left the right arm free, but the left arm was impeded by having to support multiple folds. The toga had various decorative designs — purple border for ranking magistrates and children, colored stripes for certain priests, purple with gold embroidery for triumphing generals, black for funerals and chalk-whitened for political candidates.

The End



Author Bio

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